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 ● Trump tells Davos forum he wants Greenland but will not use force to take it
 ● '3,117 were killed in Iranian protests'

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 ● SC allows Hindus, Muslims to offer prayers at Bhojshala on Basant Panchami
 ● Farmers have shown the way to workers, poor must unite to bring back MGNREGA: Rahul

Vol .No. II Issue No. 315 RNI-ASSEN/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

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 विकसित भारत - जी राम जी Act, 2025

125 Days RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE

CBC 35101/13/0083/2526

Spl funding structure for Assam on cards: Margherita

'VB-G Ram G Act gives shape to Gandhi's vision of empowered villages'

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 22: Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles Pabitra Margherita on Thursday said the newly introduced Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rojgar and Ajeevika Mission Grammeen (VB-G Ram G Act) gives concrete shape to Mahatma Gandhi's vision of strong, self-reliant villages by translating ideals into actionable policy.

Addressing a press conference at the Circuit House here, Margherita announced a special funding structure for Assam and other northeastern and Himalayan foothill states under the scheme.

He said that unlike the standard 60:40 cost-sharing model between the Centre and states, the northeastern region would contribute only 10 per cent of the funds, with the Centre bearing the remaining 90 per cent.

He described the move as a clear indication of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to the development of the region.

Highlighting a major provision of



the Act, the minister said it replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and increases the guaranteed number of workdays in rural areas from 100 to 125 days annually.

He termed this enhancement a landmark step that would significantly strengthen income security for rural households.

Margherita said the scheme is anchored in direct benefit transfer, ensuring that wages are credited

Zubeen Garg death case: Shyamkanu, Sandipan withdraw bail applications

Garima happy with prosecution arguments

GUWAHATI, Jan 22: Two accused in the Zubeen Garg death case, North East India Festival director Shyamkanu Mahanta and the singer's cousin Sandipan Garg, on Thursday withdrew their bail petitions during a hearing at a court here.

The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court was hearing the bail pleas of five of the seven accused when Mahanta and Sandipan Garg's lawyers withdrew their petitions.

Mahanta is accused of murder, while the singer's cousin, a suspended Assam Police officer, has been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

The court heard the bail petitions of singer Amritprava Mahanta and Garg's personal security officers Parsh Baisya and Nandesar Bora.

The court is scheduled to hear the matter again on January 30, when it is likely to pass an order on the bail petition.

Two other accused, singer's secretary Siddhartha Sharma and Garg's band member Shekhar Jyoti Goswami, have not applied for



bail yet.

The accused were present virtually during the hearing while Zubeen Garg's widow Garima and the singer's sister, Palmee Borthakur, were present physically in the court.

Garima told reporters that the prosecution put up a strong case opposing the bail petitions and they were satisfied with the arguments.

Borthakur said the court would decide on the bail pleas on January 30. "We are waiting for that," she said.

In a Facebook post later, Garima demanded the need for a special court for speedy dispensation of justice.

Giving details of the hearing, she said not only Zubeen's family, but people from across Assam and the world are demanding that the accused should not be "granted bail till the hearing is completed and justice is ensured".

She said though Mahanta and

Sandipan have withdrawn their petitions, the family has also appealed that the bail of all the accused should be denied.

"The days are passing by and the justice process was going on in the court but we, his family, the people of Assam are spending their days in uncertainty and waiting for justice," she said.

The entire circumstances of his death is still nor clear and "we are hoping that the matter leading to his death is revealed soon with all involved given the strictest punishment", she added.

Garg had gone to attend the North East India Festival in Singapore, where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19.

The Assam government constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the singer's death and had submitted the chargesheet on December 12.

In its chargesheet, the SIT accused Mahanta, Sharma, Goswami and Amritprava of murder.

While Sandipan Garg has been charged (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Guwahati police raid five spas, rescue 13 women

GUWAHATI, Jan 22: Ten people have been arrested and 13 alleged victims of flesh trade rescued from five spas in the city, a police officer said on Thursday.

Acting on specific information, Guwahati city police conducted raids in five spas located under Chandmari, Paltanbazar, Panbazar and Geeta Nagar police station areas, Deputy Commissioner of Police Shambhavi Mishra told reporters.

Police had received information that illegal activities were being carried out in these unisex spas and identified five such centres, she said.

A coordinated operation was launched (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

KAAC distributes over 3,000 land pattas under 'Purthimi Akemang 2.0' in Bokajan

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, Jan 22: In a major step towards strengthening land security and promoting rural development, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Land and Revenue Department on Thursday organised a large-scale land patta distribution programme at the Balijan DC LP School playground under the initiative "Purthimi Akemang 2.0" (Our Land, Our Rights).

The programme covered beneficiaries from the Sarupathar and Bokajan Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituencies, marking a significant milestone in KAAC's efforts to ensure formal land ownership for indigenous communities of the region.

Chief Executive Member of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang, led the distribution and handed over land pattas to more than 3,000 beneficiaries belonging to various indigenous groups across Karbi Anglong.

Addressing the gathering, Ronghang said providing free-of-cost land pattas, ensuring permanent land settlement, remains a top priority of his administration to guarantee long-term security and stability for the people.

The CEM also announced initiatives aimed at youth empowerment, stating that students who have cleared the HSLC and HS examinations would be eligible for skill development training programmes.

He added that upon completion of the training, the council would facilitate job placement assistance or employment opportunities for the trained youth.

During the ceremony, Lumta Hanse and Sarlongki Terang were formally appointed as Sarkari Gaon (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Amrit Bharat Express trains begin regular operations

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 22: Amrit Bharat Express trains, inaugurated earlier by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have now been introduced for regular operations under the Northeast Frontier Railway, marking a significant step towards strengthening long-distance rail connectivity while offering affordable and modern travel facilities to passengers.

The Train No 15949/15950 Dibrugarh-Gomti Nagar-Dibrugarh Amrit Bharat Express will run on a weekly basis.

The inaugural regular service from Dibrugarh will commence on January 30, 2026, departing at 21:00 hours every Friday, while the return service from Gomti Nagar will begin on February 1, 2026, departing at 18:40 hours every Sunday.

The train will halt at key stations including Moranhat, Simaluguri, Mariani, Furkating, Dimapur, Diphu, Lumding, Guwahati, Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, New Alipurduar, New Jalpaiguri, Katihar, Barauni, Gorakhpur, Ayodhya Dham Junction and Barabanki.

Another weekly service, Train No 16597/16598 SMVT Bengaluru-Alipurduar-SMVT Bengaluru Amrit Bharat Express, will start its regular run from SMVT Bengaluru on January 24, 2026, departing at 08:50 hours every Saturday.

The return journey from Alipurduar will commence on January 26, 2026, departing at 22:25 hours every Monday. En route, the train (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Day 2 to screen six films from India and Asia

GAFF 2026 opens at Jyoti Chitran

STAFF REPORTER
GUWAHATI, Jan 22: The second edition of the Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF) got underway on Thursday at Jyoti Chitran, marking a four-day celebration of Asian and Indian cinema with a curated lineup of 26 films.

The inaugural ceremony was held on January 22 in the presence of noted filmmakers, invited guests and delegates.

The festival is being organised by Trending Now Media with support from the National Film Development Corporation and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

GAFF 2026 opened with the Uzbekistan feature film Sunday, directed by Shokir Kho-



likov. The opening day also saw the India premiere of Japanese film S by Masahiro Ota in the Asian Cinema section, along with An Evening Ballad by Bishal Swargiary in the Indian Showcase (non-

competition) segment.

The second day of the festival, January 23, will feature six films, including the Karbi-language film The Lost Path (Kangbo Aloti) by Khanjin Kishore Nath, Assamese film

অসম চৰকাৰ

পৰাক্ৰম দিবসত নেতাজীনে শ্ৰদ্ধাঞ্জলি

সাহস, ত্যাগ, অদম্য আত্মবিশ্বাসৰ প্ৰতীক, স্বদেশপ্ৰেমৰ অনুপম চানেকিৰে মহীয়ান নেতাজী সুভাষ চন্দ্ৰ বসুদেৱৰ আদৰ্শই দেশবাসীক যুগে যুগে উদ্বুদ্ধ কৰক। এই মহান মনীষীগৰাকীৰ জয়ন্তীত অসমবাসীৰ হৈ তেখেতলৈ গভীৰ শ্ৰদ্ধা নিবেদন কৰিছোঁ

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DIPR/D/HLT/281/23-Jan-26

IndiGo Q3 profit plunges 78 pc to ₹ 549 cr; ops disruptions cause ₹ 577 cr financial impact

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: India's largest airline IndiGo on Thursday reported a 78 per cent decline in December quarter net profit at ₹ 549.1 crore as flight disruptions and implementation of the new labour code took a toll on its earnings. The airline reported a net profit of ₹ 549.1 crore in the October-December quarter, compared with ₹ 2,448.8 crore earnings in the year-ago period, according to a company statement.

The company said it took a hit of ₹ 1,546.5 crore in the third quarter. This included ₹ 577.2 crore due to massive flight disruptions witnessed during early December and another ₹ 969.3 crore on account of the implementation of new labour laws.

IndiGo was slapped with a fine of ₹ 22.2 crore for the flight disruptions, which it has accounted for in exceptional items.

Currency movement related to dollar-based future obligations aggregated to ₹ 1,035 crore in the December quarter.

In the third quarter of the current financial year, InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of IndiGo, recorded a total income of ₹ 24,540.6 crore, higher than ₹ 22,992.8 crore posted in the year-ago period.

IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said in the December quarter, the company faced major operational disruptions that resulted in significant flight cancellations and delays from December 3 to 5.

"Despite these operational disruptions, IndiGo delivered a topline of around 245 billion rupees in the December quarter, reflecting a growth of around 7 per cent with a reported profit of around 5 billion rupees and an underlying profit excluding exceptional items and



forex of 31 billion rupees," Elbers said. In the December quarter, the airline carried nearly 32 million passengers, and the total number of passengers flown last year stood at around 124 million.

"Exceptional items for the quarter ended December 2025 were ₹ 15,465 million, including estimated provision towards implementation of new labour laws of ₹ 9,693 million, costs related to operational disruptions of ₹ 5,550 million and penalty of ₹ 222 million as per the DGCA order," the release said.

For the coming March quarter, the airline has projected capacity growth of around 10 per cent in terms of ASKs (Available Seat Kilometres) compared to the year-ago period. The growth will be largely on the international routes.

ASK is an indicator of capacity. The airline's fleet had 440 planes at the end of the December quarter.

"Our long-term fundamentals remain strong, backed by our expanding fleet, growing domestic and international network," Elbers said.

In early December, IndiGo faced massive op-

erational disruptions, and subsequently, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) curtailed the airline's winter schedule by 10 per cent until February 10.

Between December 3 and 5, 2,507 flights were cancelled, and 1,852 flights were delayed, impacting over 3 lakh passengers at airports across the country, the regulator said in a statement on January 20.

During an analysts call to discuss the results, Elbers stressed that there are no changes in the long term plans and also added that in-depth review is being done with respect to the disruptions. Internal processes are also being strengthened, he added.

To a PTI query on the financial impact due to the airspace closure, Elbers said the airline has not precisely released a number while some of the flights, especially from the northern part of India, are having 20 to 30 minutes of additional block time which means also burning more fuel.

Generally, block time refers to the duration of a flight from one place to another.

During a call with mediapersons post the results announcement, Elbers said there will be an impact due to the curtailed schedule in the fourth quarter.

Besides the impact, every quarter has different dynamics on AOG (Aircraft on Ground), on weather and all kinds of different elements which are affecting the exact capacity.

On January 17, DGCA announced slapping fines totalling ₹ 22.20 crore for the December flight disruptions, and also warned CEO Pieter Elbers and two other senior executives for the lapses. (PTI)

LG Electronics rolls out 2026 BEE star-rated air conditioners ahead of season

Among first brands to offer future-ready ACs as stricter energy norms promise long-term savings for consumers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 22: LG Electronics India Limited has announced the launch of its complete range of air conditioners compliant with the new 2026 Bureau of Energy Efficiency star rating norms, positioning itself among the first companies in the country to make future-ready, energy-efficient cooling solutions available to consumers ahead of the peak summer season.

The early rollout ensures that Indian customers have immediate access to air conditioners aligned with the upgraded BEE standards, which significantly raise energy efficiency benchmarks and bring India closer to global performance norms. LG Electronics said its proactive transition reflects a strong focus on sustainability, responsible manufacturing and long-term consumer value.

Under the revised 2026 framework, efficiency thresholds have been made more stringent, meaning models earlier classified as five-star may now fall under a lower rating despite offering the same or better performance. The reclassification, the company said, is intended to en-

courage the adoption of more advanced, low-power technologies rather than indicating any decline in product capability.

Industry estimates suggest that switching to a five-star air conditioner under the 2026 norms can help households save up to ₹19,000 over a ten-year period, depending on usage patterns and electricity tariffs. LG Electronics said its new lineup is designed to deliver these savings while maintaining superior cooling performance. The company's 2026 BEE-compliant air conditioners have been available in the market since early January, making LG one of the earliest brands to complete the transition. This ensures that consumers purchasing ahead of summer are not investing in products built to older standards.

The new range also introduces customer-centric features aimed at improving comfort and energy management. The Precool function uses geofencing technology through LG ThinQ to automatically cool homes as users approach, while Energy Manager+ analyses past usage to recommend realistic operating hours

and consumption targets, allowing users to set periodic energy budgets.

Commenting on the launch, Sanjay Chitkara, Co-Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, LG Electronics India Limited, said the company remains committed to supporting India's shift towards higher energy efficiency through early compliance and continuous innovation. He said LG's portfolio is fully aligned with the new BEE standards, enabling consumers to save on electricity costs while enjoying reliable and advanced cooling solutions.

To support consumers during the transition, LG Electronics is rolling out an extensive awareness campaign across print, digital and retail platforms to explain the new star ratings and their benefits. The company added that its manufacturing and supply chain operations are already fully aligned with the 2026 guidelines. While the focus remains on the new compliant models, air conditioners manufactured under the previous norms will continue to be sold until existing inventories are exhausted, giving buyers greater flexibility in their purchasing decisions.

Markets rebound after 3-day slide on easing geopolitical tensions

MUMBAI, Jan 22: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Thursday after three sessions of losses, tracking gains in global markets after US President Donald Trump struck a conciliatory tone on Greenland and hinted at a good trade deal with India.

Besides, a mild recovery in the rupee and a correction in global crude prices supported the domestic markets, traders said. In a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 397.74 points, or 0.49 per cent, to close at 82,307.37. During the day, the benchmark surged by 873.55 points, or 1.06 per cent, to hit an intraday high of 82,783.18, but failed to sustain higher levels due to selling pressure at elevated levels.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rose 132.40 points, or 0.53 per cent, to settle at 25,289.90. In the intraday session, the index appreciated by 278.25 points, or 1.10 per cent, to hit a high of 25,435.75. The trend clearly showed weak follow-through buying at higher zones. "Buying interest emerged in the market following positive global cues amid signs of cooling geopolitical tension over Greenland. The EU nations agreed on a framework for control over Greenland with US President Trump, following which the US rolled back plans

to impose additional 10 per cent tariffs on certain European countries. "Further, there is renewed optimism over the India-US trade deal after Donald Trump's positive comments on the agreement at the Davos Summit," said Sid-dhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

Among the 30 Sensex constituents, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Tata Steel, Adani Ports, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Asian Paints, Power Grid, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndiGo, Hindustan Unilever, HCL Technologies and NTPC were the gainers. On the other hand, Eterna, Titan, ICICI Bank, Maruti Suzuki India, and HDFC Bank were among the laggards. Indian equity markets ended Thursday with moderate gains after paring early advances, supported by positive global cues and easing geopolitical concerns.

"Sentiment improved following US President Donald Trump's withdrawal of tariff threats against the EU and his optimistic remarks on a potential India-US trade deal, which encouraged short-covering and risk-taking," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemn Markets Desk, said. (PTI)

Rupee recovers from all-time low to settle slightly higher at 91.58/USD

MUMBAI, Jan 22: The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and ended with a gain of 7 paise at 91.58 against the US dollar on Thursday, on suspected RBI intervention and a positive trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said comments from US President Donald Trump at Davos helped shift sentiment, as he confirmed that a framework for a future Greenland agreement has been reached and that tariffs scheduled for February 1 would not be implemented.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.54 and then gained ground to touch an intraday high of 91.48 against the greenback. It touched a low of 91.68 before settling for the day at 91.58, up 7 paise from its all-time low levels.

On Wednesday, the rupee plunged 68 paise to close at an all-time low of 91.65 against the American currency.

Forex traders said the currency remains under severe pressure from heightening global geopolitical uncertainties.

The pending trade agreement with the US remains a key stabilising factor. Until the geopolitical risk eases and the trade deal materialises, the rupee is likely to remain vulnerable to external shocks, they said. "At current levels, a substantial portion of global risk appears to be priced into the rupee. From here, markets may enter a phase of consolidation, with the possibility of a partial recovery if risk sentiment sta-

bilises," CR Forex Advisors MD Amit Pabari said in a research note.

The 92.00 level remains a strong resistance zone, while sustained RBI support could gradually pull USD/INR back toward the 90.50-90.70 range in the near term, Pabari added.

According to Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, the rupee was bolstered by a revival in risk appetite after US President Trump withdrew his tariff threats against Europe.

"Despite this recovery, the currency remains susceptible to external shocks, with its stability largely dependent on the easing of geopolitical tensions and the announcement of US-India trade agreements," Parmar said, adding that the spot USD-INR pair "finds support at 91.10, while facing resistance at the 92.00 psychological mark".

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent lower at 98.72.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at USD 65.33 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex climbed 397.74 points to settle at 82,307.37, and Nifty rose 132.40 points to 25,289.90.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,549.80 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

DP World signs pact to develop logistics hub in Madhya Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Logistics operator DP World on Thursday said it has signed an agreement with Madhya Pradesh to develop the Powarkhedha Logistics Composite Hub, an inland logistics gateway designed to strengthen India's export competitiveness and accelerate inclusive economic growth in Central India.

The new Powarkhedha Logistics Composite Hub will cut transit times, strengthen export supply chains, and enable farmers and MSMEs with an integrated cold chain and warehousing.

The agreement between DP World and the government of Madhya Pradesh was exchanged at the World Economic Forum in Davos in the presence of Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, Group Chairman and CEO of DP World, and Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

DP World, in a statement, marks a significant step in positioning Madhya Pradesh as a key node in India's global trade network, leveraging its central geography, export momentum, and rapidly expanding agri-processing and manufacturing base.

With this development, DP World is enhancing the state's infrastructure and supply chain capabilities to align with national trade ambitions and support long-term economic growth, it added.

Yadav said, "DP World Powarkhedha Hub will strengthen our state's role as a central trade and logistics engine connecting key districts and clusters to ports, enabling value addition, and creating new opportunities for farmers, businesses and investors."

Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, DP World Group Chairman and CEO, said, "This hub is more than a logistics project. It plays a vital role in advancing Madhya Pradesh's logistics capabilities, supporting sustainable trade flows."

The Powarkhedha Hub will significantly enhance access to global markets by enabling faster, more reliable, and cost-efficient containerised trade for key districts such as Dhar, Indore, and Raipur, all within reach of central rail corridors.

These districts are driving growth across sectors from pharmaceuticals to textiles, aluminium products and agri-commodities.

Spread across 88.3 acres, the Powarkhedha Hub is being developed as a rail-centric inland gateway connecting Central India directly to Jawaharlal Nehru Port (JNPA) at Nhava Sheva, India's largest container port, located near Mumbai on the country's west coast. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Zubeen Garg death case

with culpable homicide not amounting to murder, the singer's two PSOs have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust by misappropriating funds or property entrusted to them.

Earlier, the state cabinet appointed a five-member team of special public prosecutors, headed by senior advocate Ziaul Kamar, with Brojendra Mohan Chaudhuri as additional public prosecutor and Kishor Dutta, Pranjal Dutta and Vikash Jammur as assistant public prosecutors.

A coroner's court in Singapore had last week ruled out any foul play and said Garg was severely intoxicated and had drowned off Lazarus Island after declining a life jacket. (PTI)

Spl funding structure

single, cohesive framework. He noted that villages which once waited endlessly for development have now evolved into centres of awareness, stability and productive activity.

On decentralisation, Margherita said Gram Sabhas have been vested with greater powers, enabling villagers to identify, approve and monitor development works themselves.

This, he said, has effectively transferred decision-making authority to the grassroots.

Responding to criticism from the Congress, the Minister accused the party of reducing Mahatma Gandhi's ideals to mere symbolism.

He said the present government has focused on implementing Gandhi's principles on the ground rather than invoking them rhetorically, adding that the new Act aims to build self-reliant villages in line with Gandhian philosophy.

Margherita also alleged that rural development programmes under previous Congress-led governments were marred by corruption and inefficiency, claiming that only a fraction of funds reached intended beneficiaries.

He said the current system has removed middlemen and ensured greater accountability.

Taking a swipe at the Opposition, the minister said Congress and its allies appeared more preoccupied with internal disputes than public concerns, remarking that infighting over seat-sharing had become their primary focus.

KAAC distributes over

Buras, a move aimed at strengthening grassroots-level village administration.

The event was attended by several senior KAAC leaders and officials, including MLA Darsing Ronghang, Deputy Chairman of KAAC Avijit Kro, executive members Surjya Rongphar, Ritesh Engli, Richard Tokbi, MD Phukon, Titloma Hasnu and Madhuram Lekthe, along with MACs Kache Rongpipi, Kadom Terangpi and Mongve Rongpi.

Land and Revenue Secretary Si-im Taro and Joint Secretary Tensing Rongpi were also present. Officials, including Mandals, Supervisor Kantungos, Sarkari Gaon Buras and village headmen (Rong Asar), attended the programme in large numbers, ensuring smooth conduct of the event with wide community participation.

Guwahati police raid

and raids were conducted in these centres, rescuing 13 women allegedly forced into immoral activities by the owners, the official said.

Police also arrested 10 people, including a woman, in this connection while another woman was absconding, Mishra added.

The arrested have been remanded to judicial custody while search is on to arrest the absconding woman. (PTI)

Amrit Bharat Express

will stop at Katpadi, Renigunta, Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Khurda Road, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Kharagpur, Bardhaman, Malda Town and New Jalpaiguri.

The Train No 20604/20603 Nagercoil-New Jalpaiguri-Nagercoil Amrit Bharat Express will also operate weekly.

The service from Nagercoil will begin on January 25, 2026, departing at 23:00 hours every Sunday, while the return journey from New Jalpaiguri will start on January 28, 2026, departing at 16:45 hours every Wednesday.

This train will have stoppages at Madurai, Pollachi, Erode, Katpadi, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Kharagpur, Malda Town and Kishanganj.

Similarly, the weekly Train No 20610/20609 Tiruchchirappalli-New Jalpaiguri-Tiruchchirappalli Amrit Bharat Express will commence operations from Tiruchchirappalli on January 28, 2026, departing at 05:45 hours every Wednesday.

The return service from New Jalpaiguri will begin on January 30, 2026, departing at 16:45 hours every Friday.

The train will stop at Tambaram, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Cuttack, Kharagpur, Malda Town, Barsoi and Kishanganj.

The Kamakhya-Rohtak-Kamakhya Amrit Bharat Express, Train No 15671/15672, will also run weekly. The service from Kamakhya will start on January 30, 2026, departing at 22:00 hours every Friday, while the return journey from Rohtak will begin on February 1, 2026, departing at 22:10 hours every Sunday.

The train will have stoppages at Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Kishanganj, Katihar, Kharagaria, Barauni, Sonpur, Aunrihar, Prayagraj and Delhi.

All Amrit Bharat Express services will operate with 22-coach modern rakes designed to enhance passenger comfort while maintaining an affordable fare structure.

The introduction of regular operations of these trains under the Northeast Frontier Railway underscores the Railways' commitment to inclusive development, improved connectivity and continued modernisation of the railway network.

AFFIDAVIT

I SAFIQUE AHMED S/O. RAJAB ALI Residing at Vill- Kachari Gaon, P/O- Udali Bazar, P.S- Lanka, Dist - Hojai, Assam, 782446. Shall henceforth be known as SAFIQUE AHMED as declared before the Notary public / First Class Judicial Magistrate Hojai. MOHAMMOD SAFIQUE AHMED and SAFIQUE AHMED both are same and identical person.

AFFIDAVIT

I JUBEDA KHATUN W/O. SAFIQUE AHMED Residing at Vill- Kachari Gaon, P.O - Udali Bazar, P.S - Lanka, Dist- Hojai, Assam, 782446 shall henceforth be known as JUBEDA KHATUN as declared before the Notary public/ First class Judicial Magistrate Hojai Court. JUBEDA KHATUN And JOBADA KHATUN both are same and identical person

NAME CORRECTION

My original name is Md. Ataur Rahman, son of Late Owasis Ali, resident of Village Udmari, Revenue Circle-Daboka. In Namati Mouza, Udmari Kismat, under 60 No. Myadi Patta, Dag Nos. 221, 223, and 337, my father's name has been mistakenly recorded as Late Wahir Ali instead of Late Owasis Ali. Similarly, in the same patta, the names of my brothers and sisters Md. Mujibur Rahman, Mu. Sayarun Nessa, Late Mu. Samarun Nessa, and Late Mu. Karimun Nessa also incorrectly record their father's name as Late Wahir Ali. It is hereby clarified that Late Owasis Ali and Late Owahir Ali are the same person.

NAME CORRECTION

I, Bobby Khakholia, wife of Binod Khakholia, Resident of Flat No. - 3D, Block-C, Kamala Residency, Lawkhowa Road, P.S. - Nagaon Dist-Nagaon, Assam affirm that my name has been written in my daughter's educational documents as daughter of Bobby Khakholia instead of my actual and correct name which is recorded in my PAN Card and ADHAAR card i.e Bobby Khakholia. I declare that Bobby Khakholia and Bobby Khakholia are the name of one and same person that is Me.

VACANCY NOTICE

Golden Hospitality Services Pvt. Ltd. invites applications for contractual posts at Diphu. For our one of the Health Care industries. For below Post-

- Front Office Executive (4 Nos) - Graduate (Fresher/Exp);
- Business Dev. & Patient Coordinator (4 Nos) - Graduate with 2 yrs sales exp;
- Plumber/RO/WTP/STP (4 Nos) -ITI with 2 yrs exp;
- Manifold Attendant (3 Nos) -ITI with 2 yrs exp;
- Electrician cum DG Operator (4 Nos)-ITI with 2 yrs exp
- Medical Record Keeper (2 Nos) - Graduate with 2 yrs exp;
- Ward Secretary (4 No), -Graduate
- Medical Writer (1 No), Graduate with 2 yrs exp
- OPD Secretary (4 No), - Graduate
- Billing Desk (4 No) - B.com with 2 yrs exp.
- Ambulance Driver (1 No)- 10th Pass with LMV Commercial License.
- General Duty Attendant (32 No)-8th Pass.
- Gardener (1 No) 8th Pass
- Lift Operator-(2 Nos) 8th Pass
- Store hand general duty (1 Nos) Graduate with 1 Yrs experience.
- Laundry operator (2 Nos) 8th Pass
- MEP Supervisor-ITI with Minimum 5 Years Experience.
- Salary & statutory benefits as per assam Govt Minimum wages norms.

Application Process: Candidates must be registered with the local Employment Exchange. Only candidates sponsored by the Employment Exchange will be interviewed.

IDBI Bank posts ₹1,935 crore net profit in Q3 FY26

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Jan 22: IDBI Bank Limited on Tuesday announced its financial results for the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2025, reporting a net profit of ₹1,935 crore for the third quarter of FY26. The bank's operating profit for the quarter stood at ₹1,917 crore, reflecting sustained operational performance. During the quarter, the bank recorded a Net Interest Margin (NIM) of 3.52 per cent. The cost of deposits remained stable at 4.62 per cent in Q3 FY26, unchanged from the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

The Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) improved to 24.63 per cent, registering a year-on-year increase of 265 basis points, underscoring the bank's strong capital position. Return on Assets (ROA) for Q3 FY26 stood at 1.83 per cent, compared to 1.99 per cent in Q3 FY25, while Return on Equity (ROE) was recorded at 14.49 per cent. Asset quality indicators showed further improvement, with the net NPA ratio remaining low at 0.18 per cent as on December 31, 2025.

The gross NPA ratio declined to 2.57 per cent as against 3.57 per cent a year ago, marking an improvement of 100 basis points. The Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR) stood at 99.33 per cent, compared to 99.47 per cent as on December 31, 2024. IDBI Bank said the results reflect continued focus on balance sheet strength, prudent risk management and stable operating performance during the quarter.

Electoral Roll Observer reviews voter list amendment process in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Jan 22: Commissioner of Transport Manendra Pratap Singh, appointed as the Electoral Roll Observer for Sivasagar district by the Election Commission of India, visited Sivasagar on Wednesday and held a review meeting on the special amendment process of voter lists in view of the upcoming Assembly elections. District Election Officer and District Commissioner Mridula Yadav, IAS, warmly welcomed the Observer at the outset of the meeting.

During the review, the Observer held detailed discussions with Registration Officers, Booth Level Supervisors and Booth Level Officers and briefed them on various aspects of the ongoing special amendment process, including claims and objections. He emphasised the need for utmost seriousness and diligence in ensuring that the voter lists for the 95th Demol,

96th Sivasagar and 97th Nazira Assembly constituencies are transparent, error-free and impartial before their publication for the Assembly Elections 2026.

Manendra Pratap Singh also interacted with representatives of recognised political parties and discussed issues related to electoral roll revision. Election Officer Aditi Neog made a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the special amendment process during the meeting.

The meeting was attended by Nazira Co-District Commissioner Pratibha Meshram, Additional Deputy Commissioners Lukumani Bora, Sonatrishna Gharphalia and Meenakshi Perme, Assistant Commissioners Chandana Jahnabi and Bidisha Shaikia, along with Election Registration Officers, Assistant Election Registration Officers, Booth Level Supervisors, Booth Level Officers and representatives of recognised political parties.

Dillai Police seize 320 kg Burmese betel nut in high-speed chase

BOKAJAN, Jan 22: In a successful anti-smuggling operation, Dillai Police intercepted a Maruti Alto near Dillai Ahithi carrying 9 bags of illegal Burmese betel nut (supari), weighing approximately 320 kg, valued at around Rs 3 lakh.

The vehicle, traveling from Khatkhati via the Langvoku route, tried to evade a routine checkpoint by taking a jungle path. Police gave chase and cornered the car, seizing the contraband.

Two individuals, Raju Hussain (Nagaon) and Nazir Hussain (Doboka), were taken into custody. The operation was led by Dillai Police OC Jitumoni Saikia and a case has been registered for further investigation into the smuggling network.

Hunmily Rongpharpi of KA awarded PhD by Mahatma Gandhi University

HT Correspondent
HAMREN, Jan 22: Hunmily Rongpharpi, daughter of Kong Rongphar of Jiribasa Karbi Village, West Karbi Anglong, has been awarded a Doctorate Degree (PhD) by Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya, during a formal ceremony held in Guwahati.

Her achievement has sparked pride and joy across the district, inspiring the younger generation to pursue higher education and research.

Dr Rongpharpi's research focused on gender and literature. Her thesis, titled "Women's Emancipation and Individuality in Henrik Ibsen's Major Plays: A Critical Study," examines themes of freedom and identity for women in Ibsen's works.

This milestone not only honours her family but also establishes her as a role model for aspiring scholars in Karbi Anglong.



UPPL and ABSU visit relief camps; authorities close three camps as normalcy returns

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 22: Assam Cabinet Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma has appealed to all sections of society to maintain peace and harmony as the situation in the greater Karigaon area of Kokrajhar district has largely returned to normal. With improvement in the situation, three out of the five relief camps have been closed by Thursday evening, according to official sources.

More than 450 families are currently taking shelter in two relief camps located at Karigaon High School and Bhaoraguri near Aodang Bazar. The three camps that have been closed are Sonapara, Haldwibari and No 6 Bashbari, following the restoration of peace in those areas.

On Wednesday, Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma visited relief camps at different locations and interacted with the inmates. He took stock of the prevailing situation and assured the affected families of all necessary support from the State Government. The minister stated that the government has initiated strong measures to restore peace and tranquillity in the region and urged citizens to maintain unity and integrity during the process of normalisation.

A high-level team of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), led by party general secretary Raju Kumar Narzary, also visited



the relief camps to assess the situation. Narzary described the incident as unfortunate and unwanted and appealed to all sections of society to maintain peace and harmony for healthy integration in the region. He demanded that the district administration, local government and State Government take bold initiatives to ensure the safety and security of life and property.

The UPPL team submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Kokrajhar, urging the administration to provide

sufficient relief materials in the camps. The memorandum also called for necessary steps to ensure security in affected areas under Kokrajhar subdivision, along with adequate health services and educational facilities, especially for students appearing in the HSLC and Higher Secondary final examinations.

The party further urged the authorities to improve proper distribution of food and essential supplies as per the relief manual. Camp residents raised concerns over the non-receipt

of basic rations and demanded proper Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, temporary shelters, warm clothing and special care for infants, children and women. Support was also sought for students to ensure their studies are not disrupted. The UPPL demanded temporary police outposts in affected villages to facilitate early repatriation and rehabilitation of displaced families and stressed strict enforcement of the rule of law in sensitive areas.

ABSU president Dipen Boro, along with other members, also visited the violence-affected areas and appealed to the district administration and State Government to take necessary steps to restore peace and normalcy.

Meanwhile, the district civil and police administration has strengthened security arrangements in the violence-affected areas of Kokrajhar subdivision. Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel and CRPF have been deployed in remote and sensitive areas to maintain peace.

Deputy Commissioner of Kokrajhar Pankaj Chakravarty stated that the situation has returned to normal and no fresh incidents were reported till Thursday evening. He confirmed that three relief camps have been closed following the restoration of peace in the area.

Dr Madhuryamandit Barua receives National Academic Innovation Award 2026

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 22: Eminent researcher-historian and Registrar of Auniati University, Dr Madhuryamandit Barua, has been conferred the National Academic Innovation Award 2026 by the Chandigarh-based International Institute of Organised Research (i2OR) in recognition of his outstanding contributions to original research and the academic field.

Dr Barua was selected for the award particularly for his significant scholarly work on Assam's history. A member of the Assamese Language Advisory Council of the Sahitya Akademi, he is the author of the monumental three-volume book, 'Assam Buranjis', which

chronicles six thousand years of Assam's history.

Beginning his professional career in journalism at the age of 15, Dr Barua became editor of the newspaper 'Ganatantra' by 18 and later served as founding Chief Editor of the Asom Sahitya Sammilani. He is currently a member of the Executive Committee of the Asam Sahitya Sabha. Born in 1975 in Nagaon, he has contributed extensively to Assamese research in a relatively short span of time.

Among his notable works are 'History of the Kalita Community', 'Assamese Mahabharata Literature', 'Birthplace of Bezbarua', 'Ram Saraswati', 'Modern Assam and Sankardev Studies', 'Journal-

ism in Nagaon (1846-1999), and 'Birthplace of Srimanta Sankardev'. In 2025, his novel 'Dasharathi-Dashagriva' was also published.

Dr Barua has received several prestigious honours, including the Ram Saraswati Award (2018), Biringa Sahitya Award (2021), Ranju Hazarika Sahitya Award (2022), Human Rights Award (2023) from the Crime Control Bureau of Assam, Karmayogi Award (2022), Assam History Research Award (2024) and the Journalistic Literature Award (2025), among others.

The recognition by i2OR highlights Dr Barua's role in advancing research and innovation in the academic study of Assam's rich history.

NTPC Bongaigaon organises management programme on strategic leadership



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Jan 22: NTPC Bongaigaon, Salakati, organised a three-day Management Development Programme (MDP) on "Practicing Strategic Leadership" for its mid-level executives in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Shillong from January 19 to 21. The programme was aimed at strengthening leadership capabilities and equipping executives with contemporary tools and perspectives to address evolving organisational and people-centric challenges.

The programme was inaugurated by Arnab Maitra, Head of Project, NTPC Bongaigaon, who highlighted the importance of strategic leadership in today's complex and dynamic work environment. He stated that such focused capacity-building initiatives play a crucial role in developing leaders who can effectively align NTPC's organisational objectives with innovation, empathy and long-term sustainability.

The academic sessions were

conducted by Dr Sitanshu Shekhar Das and Dr Priya Alat, Assistant Professors in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources at IIM Shillong. The faculty members shared in-depth insights into contemporary leadership practices through the SMILE Framework, which emphasises Strategic thinking, Motivation levels, Innovation, Learning agility and Empathetic leadership. The sessions also addressed leadership approaches required for effectively managing and engaging Gen Z and Gen Alpha employees in increasingly complex and fast-paced work environments.

A total of 28 executives from various cross-functional domains of NTPC Bongaigaon participated in the programme, enabling rich peer learning and exchange of experiences. Participants presented case studies based on real-life workplace situations and actively interacted with the faculty to seek guidance on strategic decision-making, leadership challenges and effective people management.

Margherita MLA inaugurates 840-meter 'Gourav Path' in Jayanagar

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Jan 22: In Margherita town's Ward No 1, the newly constructed 840-meter-long "Gourav Path" in Jayanagar was formally inaugurated on Wednesday by Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma. The road, built at a cost of nearly Rs 4 crore 28 lakh 20 thousand was developed under the Chief Minister's Urban Pucca Road Construction Scheme by the Assam Government's Public Works (Roads) Department. During the grand inauguration ceremony held in the presence of Jayanagar residents, MLA Sharma highlighted that the successful completion of such development schemes is possible only with the active support and cooperation of the public. The event was presided over by Sashidhar Shyam, president of the Margherita Senior Citizen Association and attended by several dignitaries including Margherita Municipal Board Ward Commissioner Satya Ranjan Kakoty, senior citizen Somamoni Singh, Bhaskar Sharma Fans Club president Jyotish Rai, BJP leader Sukhdev Sharma, Simanta Madhav Katoky, Bhim Karmakar, Tara Prasad Dehingia, Margherita Municipal Chairman Anand Kumar Sharma.

ADWC urges peace and vigilance after Karigaon incident in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Jan 22: Terming the recent mob lynching incidents at Karigaon in Kokrajhar district on January 19 as unfortunate and shameful, Sinesh Hembrom, Executive Member of the Adivasi Welfare and Development Council (ADWC), expressed serious concern over the abnormal situation in the area.

Speaking to the media, Hembrom demanded a high-level inquiry into the incident and urged authorities to ensure exemplary punishment for all involved. He stressed the need for strict action to prevent the recurrence of such incidents and to restore public confidence.

In view of the prevailing situation, Hembrom appealed for the temporary cancellation of all public programmes and called on the administration to enforce stringent measures to avoid large gatherings. He warned that miscreants might attempt to exploit the situation for disruptive or conspiratorial activities.

CSIR-NEIST hosts workshop on genomics-based pathogen detection

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Jan 22: CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (CSIR-NEIST), Jorhat, successfully organised a two-day national workshop and training programme titled "Decoding Pathogens Using Genomics Approaches for One Health (DePG-OH)" on January 21-22.

Part of the GDP-FINER project funded by the Department of Biotechnology, the programme aims to assess potential emerging infectious zoonotic diseases in North Eastern states, focusing on human, animal and environmental health under the One Health framework. The workshop was inaugurated by Professor Shekhar C Mande, president of INSA and Dr Kartik Neog, Director of CMER&TL. Professor Mande highlighted the role of genomics in disease emergence, spillover and public health preparedness, while Dr Virendra M Tiwari emphasised CSIR-NEIST's commitment to capacity building and translational research.

KADCC hails massive turnout at 'Notun Bor Ahom' Workers' Meet

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Jan 22: The Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) expressed gratitude to residents for the large turnout at the "Notun Bor Ahom" Workers' Meet in Dengaon, which saw around 15,000 participants. The event featured APCC president Gaurav Gogoi, AICC Senior Observer Bhupesh Baghel and senior

leaders Debabrata Saikia and Rokibul Hussain. KADCC Vice president Jagatsing Engti said the turnout reflects public dissatisfaction with the current administration and a demand for change. He countered BJP claims that attendance was under 1,500, calling them attempts to downplay revived Congress support.

Engti also accused the Karbi Anglong Au-

tonomous Council of corruption and mismanagement, citing alleged financial irregularities in the Kajir Ronghangpi Memorial Guest House project funded by the P&RD department.

KADCC leaders confirmed plans to strengthen grassroots outreach through village-level meetings to highlight governance issues and engage with voters ahead of upcoming elections.

Dr Ranoj Pegu flags language freedom under NEP, warns of AI-driven misinformation in journalism

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 22: Assam Education Minister Dr Ranoj Pegu delivered the keynote address at the first Rabijit Choudhury Memorial Lecture at Gurucharan University, Silchar, highlighting the spirit of the National Education Policy (NEP) and the role of responsible journalism in a digital era.

Speaking on the theme "Three Language Policy of NEP: Is It the Way Forward?", Dr Pegu stressed that the NEP promotes learning with freedom, cultural balance and national unity, allowing students to choose languages and disciplines based on interest rather than compulsion. He clarified that no language, including Hindi is being imposed under the policy and learning mother tongue and MIL is encouraged but not mandatory.

The minister also warned against the growing threat of AI-generated misinformation in journalism, urging media professionals to verify facts and use technology responsibly. He highlighted the dangers of unverified content on social media and underlined the ethical re-

sponsibility of journalists to act as filters of truth.

Paying tribute to late Rabijit Choudhury, Dr Pegu remembered him as a respected journalist, public thinker and social activist who championed fairness, social justice and the uplift of marginalised communities in Assam and the Northeast.

The programme was attended by Prof Niranjan Roy, Vice Chancellor of Gurucharan University, Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, Dr Krishna Chandra Das and Shankhadeep Choudhury, son of the late journalist. Prof Roy recalled Choudhury's contributions and discussed Assam's early NEP implementation, linking mother tongue education to multilingual learning and economic growth.

The event, organised by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell in coordination with the Department of Mass Communication, included tributes, presentations and the reading of Choudhury's profile. Faculty, students and academicians attended, making it a platform for vibrant academic exchange.

Road safety awareness campaign held in Morigaon

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Jan 22: As part of the ongoing National Road Safety Month, a road safety awareness campaign was conducted in Morigaon town by the Public Works (Roads) Department (PWRD) in collaboration with the District Road Safety Committee. The programme aimed to educate the public on the importance of following road safety norms to reduce accidents and save lives. The campaign was attended by Nitisha Bora, Additional District Commissioner, Morigaon, who emphasised collective responsibility and disciplined behaviour on roads to ensure safety for all. She highlighted that awareness, combined with strict adherence to traffic rules, plays a crucial role in preventing accidents.

Cluster of stars trust extends scholarships for underprivileged students in NER

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Jan 22: Cluster of Stars, a charitable trust supporting underprivileged students since 2017, has announced the extension of its residential scholarship programme by admitting six additional students—three each for Classes VI and VII. The scholarship provides free lodging, food, clothing and education from middle school up to professional courses such as Medical, Engineering, MBA and CA, subject to satisfactory academic performance. Eligible male students from the North Eastern Region, belonging to BPL families or with annual income not exceeding ₹ 1,00,000 and who have passed Class V/VI between January and April 2026, may apply. Candidates must be physically and medically fit and willing to stay in the hostel provided by the Trust.

A written test will be held on Sunday, 22 March 2026, from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM at Pragjyotish Senior Secondary School, West Bongaon, Guwahati and other locations in Assam with more than 20 applicants. The MCQ test will cover Mathematics (30 marks), Science (25), General Knowledge (15) and Aptitude (30) and will be conducted in Assamese, Hindi, English and Bengali.

Selection will be strictly merit-based. Application forms are available at the Trust office, 3rd Floor, Late Leturam Das Market, Pandav Nagar, Pandu, Guwahati - 781012. Completed applications, with BPL/income certificate and Class V/VI mark sheet, must be submitted by 28 February 2026, 6:00 PM. For inquiries, candidates can contact 8486535639, 9560433216, or 9435585559.

Obituary

Khaniram Mili, a renowned freedom fighter, former president of the Sivasagar District Mukti Juharu Sammelan, state pensioner for freedom fighters and noted author passed away at his residence on Gadadhar Road along NH-5 near Sivasagar town on Wednesday morning. He was 99.

The last rites of Khaniram Mili were performed with full state honours at Marjarabari village in Disangmukh on Thursday. District Commissioner Mridul Yadav and Senior Superintendent of Police Shubhashish Barua were among those who attended the funeral and paid their respects.

Late Mili was closely associated with several social and cultural organisations and was also a radio artist. He authored several books and remained actively engaged in social life for decades. He is survived by seven sons and six daughters.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

You always pass failure on the way to success.
- Mickey Rooney

Creamy layer debate returns

Creamy layer debate has returned to the centre of constitutional and political attention, with the Supreme Court once again seeking the Union government's position on whether economic and social advancement within backward classes should limit access to reservation benefits. The court's renewed query, coming after two earlier notices that went unanswered, has highlighted a longstanding reluctance within the political executive to confront an issue that sits at the intersection of social justice, electoral arithmetic and constitutional morality. At the heart of the matter lies a tension that has existed since the early years of affirmative action policy. Reservations were conceived as a corrective for structural and historical exclusion, aimed at ensuring representation for communities systematically denied access to education, employment and power. Over decades, however, evidence has mounted that within some backward classes, a small but influential segment has consistently captured a disproportionate share of benefits. This phenomenon, described in legal and policy discourse as the "creamy layer", has complicated the moral clarity that once underpinned reservation policy. The Supreme Court of India has addressed this concern in multiple judgments, most notably in its rulings that introduced the creamy layer principle for Other Backward Classes in central services.

The logic was straightforward: reservation should serve those who remain socially and educationally disadvantaged, not those who have already crossed thresholds of economic security and social capital. Yet, despite judicial nudges, implementation has remained partial and uneven, and politically contentious. The present revival of the issue reflects judicial impatience with prolonged executive silence. By repeatedly asking the Union government to clarify its stand, the court is signalling that avoidance is no longer an acceptable policy posture. The absence of a formal response to earlier notices has only deepened the perception that political considerations, rather than constitutional principles, are driving inaction.

Any attempt to revisit eligibility criteria risks being portrayed as an assault on hard-won rights, a narrative that political actors are understandably wary of confronting. At the same time, ignoring the internal stratification within backward classes has created distortions that undermine the very purpose of affirmative action. Families that have benefited from reservations for generations often possess advantages that sharply distinguish them from the poorest and most marginalised within the same social category. Access to urban networks, higher education, professional employment and political influence enables them to repeatedly secure reserved opportunities, leaving first-generation aspirants crowded out.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose - A symbol of indomitable courage and firm resolve

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Among the great leaders who dreamed of wiping away the humiliation of India's subjugation and building the country as a new, self-respecting, and powerful nation, the name of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is written in letters of gold. His philosophy of life, definition of patriotism, and strategy of struggle remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration not only for his own time but also for the future ahead. Subhas Chandra Bose was not merely a political leader or a freedom fighter; he was the living embodiment of Indian civilization and culture. He firmly believed that the chains of slavery could not be broken merely through petitions and prayers; what was required was a resolve harder than steel and a tremendous strike. His thought process was extremely clear and realistic, where emotion had its place, yet reason and strategy stood even higher. To stand against a colossal power like British imperialism required the kind of mental strength and foresight that Subhas Chandra Bose possessed in full measure. He realized that as the global political landscape changed, the strategy of India's freedom struggle must also evolve. In the period following the First World War and on the eve of the Second World War, the manner in which he sought to pave the path for India's liberation through international relations and diplomacy was unparalleled and unimaginable. For him, the country's independence was an unconditional demand, and to fulfill this demand he was ready to sacrifice everything he had, even his own life, without hesitation. The revolutionary consciousness he instilled in the minds of Indian youth was an unprecedented awakening that shattered the veil of cowardice and taught every citizen of the country to roar like a lion.

Subhas Chandra Bose's political life and his relationship with the Congress are subjects of deep analysis, reflecting his independent thinking and uncompromising mentality. Although his respect for Mahatma Gandhi's leadership and the non-violent movement remained unshaken, a question always lingered in his mind: whether it was possible to defeat a cruel colonial power like the British solely through non-violence. He believed that when the enemy comes armed with weapons to suppress us, we cannot simply sit back invoking morality. This realistic outlook drew him toward armed struggle. In his view, independence is not given as a gift by anyone; it is a right to be earned through the shedding of blood. Even after being elected president of the Congress, the root cause of his differences with the senior leaders of the party lay in this divergence of perspective. He wanted the British to be compelled to leave India within a definite time frame, failing which a total mass movement should be launched. This intense and swift approach set him apart from the reformist leaders. The events at the Tripuri Congress session and his subsequent decision to form the Forward Bloc proved that he never compromised his principles for the sake of position or power. For him, the interest of the nation always stood far above party or individual concerns. As soon as the Second World War began, he understood that the British Empire was now in crisis, and India should seize this opportunity. This strategy of exploiting the enemy's weakness to liberate the country was a brilliant demonstration of his political wisdom. He never allowed domestic dis-

putes and differences to divert him from his goal; instead, following the principle of "go it alone," he ventured out into the world in search of supportive powers for India's liberation.

Escaping secretly from the country and forming an army for India's independence on foreign soil was such a daring expedition that parallels are rare in world history. Slipping away from house arrest, crossing the rugged paths of Kabul to reach Russia and then Germany—this entire journey was nothing short of a miraculous saga. It involved not only physical hardship but the constant risk of being caught or facing death at every moment. Yet his mental firmness never allowed him to falter. Once abroad, he did not merely seek shelter; he sat as an equal with the world's powerful leaders and raised the demand for India's independence. The reorganization and leadership of the Azad Hind Fauj represented the pinnacle of his organizational ability. He rekindled the flame of patriotism in the hearts of Indian prisoners of war and transformed them into a formidable army. The call of "Delhi Chalo" infused new strength into the veins of the soldiers. He understood that military strength alone was not enough to win a war; it also required the spontaneous support of the masses and economic assistance. Therefore, he united the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia and received an unprecedented response from them. Through this entire process, he proved that he was not merely a military leader but a far-sighted statesman capable of building the infrastructure to fight a vast empire from nothing. The military campaigns he conducted with Japan's cooperation shook the foundations of British rule on Indian soil.

The idea of women's dignity and active participation in Netaji's thought was a revolutionary concept for the traditional society of that era. By forming the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, he demonstrated to the entire world that women are not weak beings confined within the four walls of the home; when the need arises, they too can become fierce warriors. He had profound faith in the strength and courage of Indian women. He called upon women to play a role in the freedom struggle no less significant than that of men. In response to this call, thousands of women from educated and uneducated backgrounds, rich and poor alike, came forward. They did not limit themselves to nursing or support roles; they stood before the enemy with rifles in hand. Under leaders like Captain Lakshmi Sahgal, this regiment displayed remarkable skill and valor. For Netaji, women's liberation and the country's independence were inseparably linked. He believed that a nation which does not know how to respect women or grant them equal rights can never achieve true progress. The respectful and secure environment he created for women soldiers in his camps speaks volumes about the greatness of his character and his progressive mindset. This step helped bring about a fundamental change in Indian society's perception of women. Even today, when we speak of women's empowerment, Netaji's historic initiative stands as a guiding light for us.

The Azad Hind Fauj was a miniature version of pan-Indian unity, where religion, caste, language, or regional identity created no barriers. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians all ate from the same plate and fought together. He instilled deeply in the soldiers' minds the idea that their primary identity was that of being Indian.

Brahma, yet her role transcends familial ties, positioning her as the eternal source of all learning and eloquence. This shift from a river deity to the goddess of wisdom reflects Hinduism's profound recognition that knowledge flows like a river, purifying the soul and sustaining human progress.

Goddess Saraswati's iconography carries deep symbolic meaning that devotees meditate upon during puja. She is depicted seated gracefully on a white lotus or a swan, both symbols of purity, discernment, and spiritual transcendence. The swan, in particular, represents the ability to separate milk from water, signifying the discrimination between truth and illusion. Dressed in pristine white attire, she embodies satva, the quality of clarity, peace, and goodness. In her four hands, she holds sacred objects that define her domain: a book representing the Vedas and all scriptural wisdom, a rosary or mala for meditation and the pursuit of eternal truths, a water pot symbolizing the purifying power of knowledge, and most iconically, the veena, a stringed musical instrument that signifies the harmony of sound, creativity, and the rhythmic flow of life itself. Her serene expression and calm demeanor inspire devotees to seek inner peace alongside intellectual achievement, reminding them that true wisdom combines intellect with compassion and ethical conduct. The significance of Saraswati Puja lies in its celebration of knowledge as a divine gift and a sacred pursuit. In a world where material success often overshadows inner growth, this festival reaffirms that vidya is the highest wealth, capable of liberating the soul from ignorance and leading to enlightenment. Students place their books, notebooks, pens, and study materials before the goddess's idol, seeking her blessings for academic success, concentration, and clarity of thought. Artists offer their instru-

ments, painters their brushes, writers their manuscripts, and musicians their notes, acknowledging that creativity stems from divine inspiration. The day underscores the belief that education and the arts are not merely professional tools but pathways to spiritual evolution, fostering humility, discipline, and a lifelong quest for truth. By worshipping Saraswati, devotees aspire to cultivate eloquence in speech, precision in thought, and beauty in expression, qualities essential for personal fulfillment and societal harmony.

Rituals of Saraswati Puja begin early in the morning with meticulous preparations. Homes and educational institutions are cleaned thoroughly, adorned with rangoli patterns in vibrant colors, especially yellow and white, symbolizing spring's vitality and purity. Fresh flowers such as marigolds, palash, and jasmine are arranged, along with mango leaves and banana stems that signify auspiciousness. The central element is the idol or framed image of Goddess Saraswati, placed on a raised platform covered with a yellow or white cloth. Devotees dress in yellow garments, reflecting the season's blooming mustard fields and the goddess's association with Basant, the spring raga in Indian classical music. Yellow sweets like kesari halwa, boondi laddoo, and saffron-infused rice are prepared as offerings, while fruits, betel leaves, nuts, and incense complete the puja samagri.

The puja commences with the invocation of Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, followed by the main worship of Saraswati. A priest or family elder chants mantras from the Rigveda and other scriptures, including the popular Saraswati Vandana that praises her as the destroyer of ignorance. Offerings of flowers, sandalwood paste, vermilion, and lamps accompany the recitation. A key ritual involves placing books and tools at the goddess's feet, a practice known

as pustak puja or ayudha puja in some contexts, where even vocational instruments receive blessings. In many households, especially those with young children, the ceremony includes Aksharabhyasam, the initiation into writing, where toddlers are guided to trace letters on rice or sand with the goddess's grace, marking their formal entry into education. Homa or fire rituals are performed in temples and larger gatherings, with ghee, herbs, and mantras offered into the consecrated flames to invoke divine energy.

In West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, and Tripura, Saraswati Puja assumes a particularly grand and communal character. Schools and colleges organize elaborate celebrations, installing beautifully crafted idols in pandals or classrooms, where students perform cultural programs featuring songs, dances, recitations, and plays dedicated to the goddess. The air resonates with the strains of Saraswati Vandana and classical music, while young girls in yellow sarees participate enthusiastically. In Bengal, the immersion of the idol, or visarjan, on the following day or soon after adds an emotional farewell, with devotees carrying the deity in processions to rivers or ponds amid chants of "Jai Maa Saraswati." Odisha observes the day with homas, yagnas, and temple rituals, emphasizing scholarly pursuits. In Assam and Tripura, community feasts and artistic displays highlight regional fervor. Even in North India, where the festival is more commonly called Basant Panchami, people fly kites, wear yellow, and offer prayers at riversides, blending seasonal joy with devotion.

The festival's traditions extend beyond religious rites into cultural and social dimensions. Yellow dominates the day, from clothing to food to decorations, evoking the mustard fields in bloom and the vibrancy of spring. In Punjab and Haryana, Basant Panchami includes kite-flying festivals and agricultural celebrations, marking

the harvest season's onset. In some communities, ancestor worship and pitru-tarpan occur alongside Saraswati veneration. The emphasis on education makes this an ideal time for new beginnings in learning, with many parents choosing this auspicious day to introduce children to formal studies. The message remains timeless: knowledge must be pursued with reverence, humility, and dedication, free from ego, as Saraswati herself represents selfless wisdom.

In contemporary times, Saraswati Puja retains its relevance amid rapid modernization. As digital learning and technology reshape education, the festival reminds society of the enduring value of critical thinking, creativity, and ethical knowledge. It encourages inclusivity, as Saraswati's blessings are sought by all, regardless of background, promoting equality in the pursuit of learning. Environmental awareness also intertwines with traditions, with eco-friendly idols and reduced waste gaining prominence. The day fosters family bonds through shared preparations and prayers, strengthening cultural continuity across generations.

Saraswati Puja ultimately celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, wisdom over ignorance, and harmony over discord. By honoring the goddess who flows through every word spoken, every melody composed, and every idea conceived, devotees reaffirm their commitment to lifelong learning and artistic expression. As spring awakens nature with new blossoms and warmth, this festival awakens the inner potential for growth and enlightenment. On January 23, 2026, and every year thereafter, millions will turn toward Saraswati with folded hands, seeking not just success but the profound joy of understanding the world and oneself. In her serene presence lies the promise that true knowledge liberates, unites, and elevates humanity toward greater heights. May Maa Saraswati continue to bless all seekers with clarity, creativity, and compassion.

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Saraswati Puja - Where learning meets devotion

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

How India celebrated its first Republic Day in 1950

By: Zahid Ahmed Tapadar

As India celebrates its 77th Republic Day, reflecting on the very first Republic Day of January 26, 1950, offers a glimpse into the nation's transition from colonial rule to a Sovereign Democratic Republic. This historic occasion, as described in archival sources and later analyses, marked a defining moment in India's post-independence history. The day's events and significance have been detailed in various records, including an insightful article in Fauzi Akhbar (Sainik Samachar) and in the book *India After Gandhi* by noted historian Ramchandra Guha, which captures the essence of the celebrations.

A new dawn for India

On January 26, 1950, three years after gaining independence, India adopted its Constitution, transitioning into a fully sovereign Republic. On the historic day at 10:18 AM, in the Durbar Hall of Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhawan), the 34th and last Governor General of India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari read out a proclamation announcing the birth of the Republic of India. The Constitution of India came into effect, declaring India as a sovereign, democratic and secular state. Dr Rajendra Prasad took the oath as the President of the new republic.

The ceremonialevents

Fauzi Akhbar (now Sainik Samachar), India's oldest defence magazine, offers a detailed account of the first Republic Day observances.

"At the most solemn ceremony, held in the brilliantly lit and high domes of Durbar Hall at Government House, India was declared a Sovereign Democratic Republic exactly at 18 minutes past 10 on the morning of Thursday, January 26, 1950. Six minutes later, Dr Rajendra Prasad was sworn in as president," reported Fauzi Akhbar in its article titled "Birth of a Republic" on February 4, the same year.

"The birth of the Indian Republic and the installation of its first president were announced by a salute of 31 guns shortly after 10:30 AM," reported the Fauzi Akhbar. In an impressive swearing-in ceremony, the retiring Governor-general, C Rajagopalachari, read out the proclamation of the Republic of "India, that is, Bharat".

"... And whereas it has been declared by the said Constitution that India, that is, Bharat, shall be a Union of States comprising within the Union the territories which were hitherto the Governor's provinces, the Indian states and the Chief Commissioners' provinces," the military journal quoted the last Governor-General's speech.

Dr Rajendra Prasad then took the oath and made a brief speech, first in Hindi and then in English. "Today, for the first time in our long and chequered history we find the whole of this vast land from Kashmir in the north to Cape Comorin in the South, from Kathiawad and Kutch in the west to Coconada and Kamrup in the east, brought together under the jurisdiction of one Constitution and one Union, which takes over the responsibility for the welfare of more than 320 million men and women that in men and women that inhabit it," President Prasad said in his historic speech.

The ceremonial parade

The first Republic Day celebration unfolded at the Irwin Amphitheatre (now the National Stadium), which had been meticulously prepared for the grand occasion. The evening before, Delhi's iconic landmarks and public

spaces were illuminated, creating an atmosphere of celebration. On January 26, 15,000 attendees gathered at the venue to witness history in the making.

The over 100-year-old journal had said, "The president drove out of the Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhawan) in state exactly at 2:30 PM in a 35-year-old coach specially renovated for the occasion bearing the new emblem of Asoka's capital and drawn by six sturdy Australian horses, at a slow trot, escorted by the president's bodyguard."

And, as the procession made its way through the Irwin Amphitheatre, chants of "jai" echoed through the streets with cheers of people perched on trees and building roofs and every possible vantage point. Dr Rajendra Prasad responded to the joyous greetings of the gathered masses with warmth and folded hands.

"The drive ended exactly at 3:45 pm at the Irwin Amphitheatre where 3,000 officers and men of the three-Armed Services of India and the police with massed bands had taken positions for the Ceremonial Parade," reported the article published in Fauzi Akhbar.

Dr Rajendra Prasad's journey to the venue symbolized the day's grandeur. He travelled in a regal horse-drawn carriage adorned with the new national emblem, Ashoka's Lion Capital. Enthusiastic crowds lined the streets, cheering and waving the tri-colour as the procession passed. In his book *India After Gandhi*, noted historian Ramchandra Guha paints a vivid picture of the first Republic Day, noting its importance in India's post-Independence narrative. He highlights how the parade and accompanying events reflected the aspirations of a young Republic. Guha's account also captures the essence of the day as a unifying force for a nation that had recently overcome colonial rule and Partition.

Ramchandra Guha writes that more than 3,000 men of the Indian Armed Forces marched in front of the president. Moreover, after inspection of the parade by the President, the Artillery, fired a 31-gun salute, in three instalments. Notably, between these instalments, the parade fired a 'Feu-de-joie' or the fire of joy — a formal ceremonial gunfire — three, and then gave three 'jais' to the President of the Republic. Indian Air Force's Liberator planes flew overhead, to end this amazing spectacle. Following this, the President's horse-drawn carriage entered the stadium and escorted President Dr Prasad back to Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhawan).

Dr Prasad's return and public engagement

Following the parade, Dr Prasad's return journey through Delhi's streets was met with immense public enthusiasm. People thronged the route, cheering and celebrating their newfound identity as citizens of a republic.

A historic guest

The first Republic Day celebration was not only a national event but also an occasion of international significance. The first head of state to attend was Indonesian President Sukarno, symbolizing India's aspirations for global friendship and solidarity.

A lasting legacy

The first Republic Day not only marked the birth of the Indian Republic but also set the foundation for an annual celebration that reflects India's unity, diversity, and democratic ideals. While the scale and format of the celebrations have evolved over the years, the spirit of that historic day continues to resonate.



By: Ranjan Solomon

The idea of constituting a “Board of Peace” for Gaa may sound benevolent, even urgent, to those watching the carnage from a distance. It appeals to the liberal imagination: technocrats around a table, former leaders with gravitas, global figures invoking reconciliation, reconstruction, and stability.

Yet beneath this humanitarian vocabulary lies a deeply flawed premise. Gaza does not suffer from a deficit of ideas, administrators, or plans. It suffers from occupation, siege, apartheid, and genocide. No board - however well branded - can substitute justice with management. Besides the plan will be carried out by a pre-dominantly set of colonialists - western dominated down to the bone. The formation and, thus the formulae that might emanate from it, will be racially toned and tuned, imperialist, and be tilted in Israel's favour - and the West as a whole.

The very fact that Trump has brought a white western-dominated clique suggests that a permanent and just solution

will be elusive. It is futile to expect more substance coming from a senile leader and a group of people who do not have a track record of justice. The idea is already in distress. Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu has publicly criticized the US over the composition of a newly announced Gaza governing body. The entire idea simply does not align with what Netanyahu wants, and/or does not want. Netanyahu does not want Turkish foreign minister Hakan Fidan in the group. Just as well, an objective analyst would surmise. The question is who gave Netanyahu any authority to veto names or even propose them.

Like most things Trump plans for, get to be non-starters. This Gaza initiative is a non-starter by its very looks. Literally speaking, Israel and the US - with the sneaky support of Europe - lost the Gaza war. Gaza might be in the rubble, but it exists. And the Palestinian resilience will not allow it to go untested. This is Palestinian land. Trump has no rights to form Boards and Trusts or anything he wishes for in territory that is not his in any remote sense. Nei-

ther does he have the cultural sense or the political touch. Those close to him have suggested that his knowledge of the existence of Gaza and Palestine - there is no ‘West Bank’ in his lexicon. It is not mere lack of geography. It is worse because it is laced with the conceit of inanity.

The very concept of a Board of Peace is compromised by its genealogy. Such boards have historically emerged not from solidarity with oppressed peoples but from imperial anxiety: the desire to stabilise a crisis without addressing its root causes. They are instruments of containment, not liberation. Gaza, like Iraq before it and Afghanistan after, is being reimagined as a “problem” to be administered once resistance has been crushed or neutralised. This is not peace-building. It is post-violence governance without accountability.

The names floated for such initiatives only deepen the crisis of legitimacy. Tony Blair's involvement alone should disqualify the exercise. Blair's legacy in the Middle East is not peace but devastation - from Iraq to his dis-

The Gaza Board for Peace is humpty dumpty diplomacy

astrous tenure as Quartet envoy, where he normalised Israeli settlement expansion while preaching economic “peace” to a people under military occupation. Blair does not lack experience; he lacks moral credibility. He represents precisely the model that has failed Palestine: diplomacy without justice, growth without freedom, and negotiations without consequences.

Each member appointed by Trump is irrational. Without exception, none of them possess the qualifications for a politically sensitive task. Equally hollow is the invocation of figures like Marco Rubio. Rubio is not a statesman of peace; he is a foot soldier of American exceptionalism and Israeli impunity. His public record reveals no engagement with Palestinian history, law, or suffering - only reflexive allegiance to Israeli militarism. To imagine Rubio contributing meaningfully to Gaza's future is to mistake ideological rigidity for expertise. He is not neutral, not informed, and not trusted.

Jared Kushner's name, meanwhile, exposes the intellectual bankruptcy of the entire project. What does a real estate developer - whose primary intervention in the Palestinian question was to reduce it to land deals and luxury investments - know of dispossession, trauma, or decolonisation? Kushner's “Peace to Prosperity” plan collapsed because it treated Palestinians as obstacles to be bought off rather than a people with rights. To resurrect such thinking under a new label is not innovation; it is an insult. This brings us to the central flaw of the Board of Peace concept: it assumes peace can be engineered externally, by elites who neither live the consequences nor bear the costs of failure. It reduces Gaza to a laboratory of governance experiments,

rather than recognising it as a site of resistance, memory, and political agency. Palestinians are not stakeholders to be consulted after decisions are made. They are the authors of their own future.

Any credible peace process must begin with a non-negotiable precondition: Palestinians must lead it. Not as tokens, not as junior partners, but as architects. Gaza's civil society—its doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists, artists, and intellectuals - has survived conditions that would have destroyed most societies. These are not broken people awaiting instruction. They are among the most politically literate populations on earth, shaped by decades of struggle, debate, and sacrifice. Beyond Gaza, the wider Palestinian intellectual and political tradition - spanning the diaspora, the West Bank, refugee camps, and exile - offers a reservoir of ideas on governance, accountability, resistance, and reconciliation. From Edward Said's insistence on moral clarity to contemporary Palestinian scholars articulating decolonial futures, the intellectual groundwork for peace already exists. What has been absent is international willingness to listen without controlling.

Equally vital is the role of regional intellectuals and actors, not as proxies for Western power but as independent voices rooted in the histories of colonialism, partition, and resistance. Arab, Iranian, Turkish, African, Latin American, and Asian thinkers - many of whom understand occupation not as abstraction but lived experience—must be central to any genuine peace architecture. Peace cannot be monopolised by those whose geopolitical interests are aligned with the oppressor.

A real peace framework for Gaza would therefore look radically different

from a boardroom exercise. It would begin with an unequivocal recognition of Israeli crimes under international law, including war crimes and genocide. It would insist on accountability, not reconciliation without truth. It would prioritise the right of return, the lifting of the siege, and Palestinian self-determination—not as end goals but as starting points.

Peace is not the absence of bombs; it is the presence of justice. The obsession with boards, envoys, and committees also reveals a deeper moral evasion. It allows the international community to appear active while avoiding the hard political decisions - sanctions, arms embargoes, diplomatic isolation - that real pressure requires. A Board for Peace becomes a substitute for courage. It manages outrage rather than confronting power. There is also a danger that such a board, however framed, becomes a mechanism to sideline Palestinian resistance by rebranding it as extremism incompatible with peace.

This is a familiar tactic: delegitimise resistance, sanitise occupation, and then invite the occupied to be grateful participants in their own containment. Any peace initiative that does not affirm the legitimacy of resistance to occupation is not neutral—it is complicit. Hypocrisy has no limits. Gaza does not need a Board of Peace imposed from above. It needs the world to stop enabling its destruction and start respecting its people. Peace will not emerge from recycled elites who failed yesterday and remain unaccountable today. It will emerge from Palestinian leadership, regional solidarity, and a global commitment to justice over convenience. Until then, a Board for Peace is not a solution. It is a distraction. (Courtesy: *The Citizen*)

Union Budget 2026–27 and the export competitiveness test

By: Arya Roy Bardhan

In 2025, the external environment reminded every trading country of a basic fact: trade is not just about demand, but also about delivery. When shipping routes are disrupted, freight rates fluctuate, and trade policy uncertainty rises, the “cost of getting a product to a buyer on time” becomes as important as the product itself. The World Trade Organization (WTO) flags a weaker trade outlook into 2026 and highlights how higher tariffs and uncertainty can unwind demand and disrupt planning. A separate lesson comes from the Red Sea and canal disruptions - transits and container flows can fall sharply when security and routing risks rise, forcing diversions and longer lead times. For India, this is not a background story; it is a competitiveness constraint.

The reason is visible in recent trade arithmetic. During April–November 2025, India's merchandise exports were US\$292.07 billion, while merchandise imports were US\$515.21 billion, resulting in a merchandise trade deficit of US\$223.13 billion. Services exports were stronger, and the services surplus rose to about US\$134.13 billion, but this does not eliminate the underlying gap in goods trade. This is precisely why export competitiveness matters for macroeconomic resilience. A country can run a goods deficit if it earns a sufficient services surplus and attracts adequate capital inflows. However, it becomes more exposed when global financing tightens or when imports of goods rise with domestic growth.

India's export structure also explains why the Budget's role is pivotal. During July–September 2025, 44.29 percent of merchandise exports went to Asia, 23.82 percent to America, and 20.68 percent to Europe. The top exported product groups in that quarter were petroleum products, engineering goods, and electrical goods. These shares are not “good” or “bad” by themselves. They simply imply that competitiveness is not a single policy lever. It is a system-level problem spanning productivity, logistics, standards, credit, and incentives. The Union Budget is one of the few instruments that can move this system at scale. It can do this not by announcing targets, but by addressing three concrete constraints that exporters face: productivity and scale, trade costs and reliability, and working capital and risk.

Productivity Boost

Export competitiveness is not sustained by one-off incentives. It is sustained by a steady rise in unit values and unit efficiency. For manufacturing, that means scale, technology absorption, and quality control. For services, it means depth of capability and trust in cross-border delivery. The Budget cannot directly increase productivity, but it can finance the inputs that private firms tend to underinvest in. These include testing and certification capacity, applied research and development (R&D), worker training aligned with export sectors, and cluster-level infrastructure that lowers per-unit overheads for smaller firms. This is also where the disruption



angle comes into play. When buyers become more risk-sensitive, they demand stricter standards and shorter delivery timelines. A productivity strategy that ignores standards becomes fragile. The upcoming Budget should therefore treat standards and compliance as export infrastructure. One way is to fund a larger network of accredited testing labs and speed up certification processes. Another is to fund adoption support for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) so that quality upgrades do not remain limited to large firms.

Addressing Trade Costs

Most debates on competitiveness focus on incentives, but trade costs often dominate the margin for mid-value exports. This is where public policy has unusually high leverage. Evidence on trade facilitation is clear that better border processes can reduce costs. The WTO has estimated that full implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement can reduce trade costs by an average of 14.3 percent. The Union Budget can support this through digitisation, risk-based inspections, port and customs modernisation, and the “soft” infrastructure of information systems and coordination.

Logistics costs are the other part of the same story. If inland movement is slow or unreliable, firms either hold higher inventories or miss delivery windows. Studies have estimated India's total logistics cost at 7.97 percent of GDP in 2023–24. Even if that estimate is lower than some older narratives, the competitiveness point remains. For many export categories, reliability matters as much as average cost. The Budget's job is to keep shifting spending towards projects that reduce time-to-port and time-at-port, not just add capacity. That implies prioritising freight corridors, port connectivity, warehousing nodes near industrial clusters, and digital systems that reduce dwell time. It also implies measuring outcomes such as average clearance time, port turnaround, and delivery-time variance.

Accounting for Working Capital and Risk

Exporters finance production before payment. When global risk rises, the cost and availability of working capital become a binding constraint, especially for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Budget-linked guarantees and insurance can crowd in private credit without creating open-ended subsidies. India has been moving in this direction. For example, the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company has a Credit Guarantee Scheme for Exporters that targets collateral-free loans up to a defined ceiling for eligible exporters. The upcoming Budget should scale what works, while tightening governance to ensure rewards are linked to com-

pliance and performance, not merely borrowing.

Incentives still matter, but they should be treated as tools for stability, not as the core strategy. The cleanest export incentives are duty and tax remissions that neutralise domestic taxes embedded in exports. In Budget 2025–26, large allocations went to the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) (INR 18,233 crore) and the Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) (INR 10,170 crore). These schemes support competitiveness by preventing tax cascading. However, their impact depends on predictability and timeliness. If remission rates are revised late or claims are delayed, exporters lose liquidity and pricing power. The upcoming Budget should therefore focus less on expanding the menu of incentives and more on making remissions rule-based, time-bound, and transparent.

This is also where the Budget can do more than just introduce annual line items. The government has framed an Export Promotion Mission as an export competitiveness initiative, with a multi-year outlay. In the Budget documents, the annual provision appears as a smaller headline allocation. The competitiveness challenge is not only to fund a mission; it is to link it to measurable constraints. Mission spending must be utilised to address specific bottlenecks: standards and certification gaps, first-time exporter onboarding, market intelligence, and digital trade documentation.

Imperatives for Budget 2026–27

First, the Budget should reframe “export support” as a pipeline from productivity to delivery. This means carving out a clearly identified competitiveness window within expenditure: logistics reliability projects, accredited labs and standards capacity, and exporter finance risk-sharing. Second, it should publish a simple accountability dashboard for the major export-facing schemes. The key metrics should be execution speed and outcomes - remission claim settlement time, export credit uptake, customs clearance times, and completion milestones for logistics projects.

Third, it should protect remission schemes but make them more credible. Credibility here means stable rates, fast refunds, and a clear formula for how rates adjust when fiscal space tightens. Fourth, it should prioritise MSME export scaling through instruments that reduce fixed costs. Exporting has a steep entry cost due to compliance, certification, documentation, and market discovery. Mission-style funding can be powerful if it is spent on these shared fixed costs rather than scattered across small events.

Finally, it should treat the recent trade pattern as a warning. India's services surplus is a strength, but goods competitiveness remains the harder test. The April–November 2025 numbers show that goods trade still results in a large deficit, even as services help offset it. In a world of shipping disruptions and policy uncertainty, competitiveness is a fiscal choice. The Budget is where that choice is made credible. (Courtesy: *ORF*)

Tehran underpressure: Protest, power and the shadow of US force

By: Dipak Kurmi

The sudden appearance of European soldiers bearing Nato insignia in Greenland, almost casually reported over a weekend, was not an isolated military gesture but part of a larger, unsettling global theatre. At the same time, President Donald Trump dispatched F-35 fighter jets and strategic bombers to the Middle East, issuing dramatic statements about standing ready to assist Iranian protesters should the killings continue. In many Western capitals, the dominant question was not whether intervention was justified but when a decisive move would be made. In much of the East, however, the anxiety ran deeper and darker, shaped by historical memory. There was a palpable fear of plunging yet another society into the abyss of fratricidal civil war, a process that tears apart families, clans and communities, and leaves behind states too broken to recover. This was precisely the grim trajectory witnessed during what the West once optimistically labelled the Arab Spring, a series of uprisings whose outcomes often bore little resemblance to their initial promises of freedom and reform.

Iran's current unrest must be understood against a long and complex backdrop. Protests are woven into the fabric of the Islamic Republic's post-1979 history, reflecting unresolved tensions between ideology and aspiration, authority and accountability. Nearly 93 million Iranians have lived through decades of political, economic and institutional strain, all while the question of succession looms ominously over the system. When the Pahlavi monarchy collapsed, it did so with a clear alternative waiting in the wings in the form of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Today, by contrast, there is no universally accepted successor narrative should the Islamic Republic unravel. What began on December 28 as a protest by shopkeepers in Tehran's Grand Bazaar over the savage collapse of the Iranian rial was never designed as a coordinated attempt to overthrow the regime. It was a spontaneous eruption of frustration that rapidly evolved into nationwide demonstrations, voicing anger at corruption, mismanagement and the suffocating social controls imposed by a ruling establishment increasingly detached from everyday realities.

These grievances were sharpened by memory. Under the last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iranian society had experienced a relatively relaxed social climate, especially in urban centres. While the Shah's efforts to construct a secular national identity rooted in 2,500 years of Persian monarchy were historically selective and often self-serving, they

did leave an imprint. By invoking Cyrus the Great rather than Quranic doctrine, the monarchy attempted to cultivate pride and continuity distinct from religious zeal. Yet the Pahlavi dynasty itself, ruling from 1925 to 1979, was a parvenu enterprise, lavishly showcased during the infamous Persepolis celebrations even as political repression and economic inequality deepened. Had the petrodollar-fuelled propaganda been matched by meaningful political and economic reform, Iran's trajectory might have been very different. Instead, the monarchy collapsed, triggering decades of Western hostility, sanctions and boycotts that compounded domestic pressures and narrowed the leadership's options in moments of crisis.

The reimposition of punishing US sanctions in 2018 proved especially devastating. Inflation soared, livelihoods were destroyed, and confidence in the government's capacity to manage the economy eroded rapidly. Against this backdrop, President Trump's June air attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, followed by threats of further strikes, were widely perceived inside Iran as reckless and inflammatory. The administration's claim that such actions were intended to “help” protesters rang hollow to ordinary citizens struggling to understand how nuclear bombardment and diplomatic disengagement advanced the proclaimed Make Iran Great Again agenda. The abrupt cancellation of talks, combined with open encouragement from Washington for protesters to remain on the streets and attack government buildings, reinforced longstanding suspicions of foreign manipulation rather than solidarity.

Tehran initially attempted a measured response. The government announced economic reforms, replaced the central bank governor, scrapped a preferential exchange rate for certain imports and introduced a modest monthly cash transfer of seven dollars. These steps, however, were widely seen as inadequate and poorly timed. As demonstrations spread, the state's response hardened. From January 8 onwards, a near-total communications blackout was imposed, thousands were arrested, and violence escalated sharply. While no official death toll has been released, the authorities' admission that more than 100 security personnel were killed is telling. Opposition groups claim that hundreds, possibly thousands, of protesters also lost their lives. The defiant tone of the leadership was captured when Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi told Al Jazeera, in a pointed message to Washington, that Iran was ready for war. Almost simultaneously, President Trump was assuring protesters that help was on the way, a juxtapo-

sition that pushed the crisis closer to the brink.

Harsh repression is not new in Iran, but seasoned observers argue that the present moment is different. The ruling clerical establishment appears trapped, unable to articulate a credible path forward even if it manages to suppress the current unrest. President Masoud Pezeshkian's candid admission, on the eve of the protests, that he could do nothing about the country's economic woes underscored this paralysis. His own political biography reflects Iran's contradictions. As a member of the Majlis from 2008 to 2024, he openly criticised the authorities over the death of Jina Mahsa Amini and the brutal response to protests that began in 2009. As health minister under the reformist President Mohammad Khatami, he was associated with a more open era. Yet he is also seen as loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and constrained by a deeply conservative parliament, limiting his room for manoeuvre.

Historically, waves of protest have forced concessions. The mass demonstrations of 2009 eventually nudged Iran towards negotiating a nuclear deal with the West. Economic protests in 2019 resulted in expanded subsidies. The women-led uprising of 2022 led to a partial relaxation of social restrictions. Today, however, the regime's options are narrower than ever. Years of neglect have left structural economic problems unresolved, while Iran's regional network of allies has been severely weakened, particularly after Israel's multi-front wars in 2023. A brief but intense 12-day conflict with Israel further exposed vulnerabilities and degraded defence capabilities, eroding the sense of strategic depth that once insulated Tehran from external pressure.

With the spectre of US military intervention looming, the leadership increasingly views domestic protests through the lens of national security rather than social reform. Trump's oblique warning about Greenland, Denmark and the ease with which great powers can reshape realities elsewhere was not lost on Tehran. His reference to Venezuela served as a reminder of how quickly pressure can escalate into overt interference. In such circumstances, the apparent cooling of protests may bring temporary relief to the authorities, but it offers no lasting solution. Iran stands at a crossroads where internal dissent, economic decay and external yzyos intersect. The world may be relieved that the streets are quieter for now, but beneath the surface, the unresolved tensions that produced this crisis remain as potent and dangerous as ever. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

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With this lunatic, you (the people) don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, says a Nuuk resident

Trump tells Davos forum he wants Greenland but will not use force to take it

DAVOS, Jan 22: President Donald Trump insisted Wednesday that he wants to "get Greenland, including right, title and ownership," but said he would not use force to do so while deriding European allies and vowing that NATO should not try to block US expansionism.

In an extraordinary speech at the World Economic Forum, the president said he was asking for territory that was "cold and poorly located." He said the US had effectively saved Europe during World War II and even declared of NATO: "It's a very small ask compared to what we have given them for many, many decades."

"We probably won't get anything unless I decide to use excessive strength and force, where we would be frankly unstoppable. But I won't do that, OK?" Trump said, later adding, "I don't have to" and "I don't want to use force."

Trump often tries to increase pressure on the other side when he believes it can lead to a favorable deal, and he seemed happy to do so ahead of the forum in Davos.

The implications of his remarks were enormous, potentially rupturing an alliance that has held firm since the dawn of the Cold War and seemed among the globe's most unshakable pacts.

NATO was founded by leading European nations, the U.S. and Canada to form a bloc to counter



the Soviet Union. Its other members have been steadfast in saying Greenland is not for sale and cannot be wrested from Denmark, meaning Trump's comments could yet mark the beginning of a larger geopolitical standoff.

The president has long said the US will get control of Greenland no matter what it takes, arguing that Washington needs the world's largest island to counter threats in the surrounding Arctic Ocean from Russia and China. That's despite America already having a large military base there.

A Danish government official told The Associated Press after Trump's speech that Copenhagen

is ready to discuss US security concerns. But the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, underscored the government's position that "red lines"—namely Denmark's sovereignty—must be respected.

Greenland's government responded by telling its citizens to be prepared. It has published a handbook in English and Greenlandic on what to do in a crisis that urges residents to ensure they have sufficient food, water, fuel and supplies at home to survive for five days.

"We just went to the grocery store and bought the supplies," said Tony Jakobsen in Greenland's cap-

ital Nuuk said, showing off the contents of bags that included candles, snacks and toilet paper.

Jakobsen said he thought Trump's rhetoric towards Greenland was "just threats... but it's better to be ready than not ready."

Trump, meanwhile, urged Denmark and the rest of NATO to stand aside, adding an ominous warning. "We want a piece of ice for world protection, and they won't give it," Trump said. "You can say yes, and we will be very appreciative. Or you can say no, and we will remember."

He also called for opening "immediate negotiations" for the U.S. to acquire Greenland. "This enormous unsecured island is actually part of North America," Trump said. "That's our territory."

You have to be prepared for almost anything'

In Nuuk, resident Johnny Hedemann said it was "insulting" that Trump "talks about the Greenlandic people and the Greenlandic nation as just an ice cube." He spoke while heading out to buy a camping stove and instant mashed potatoes.

"Living in this nature, you have to be prepared for almost anything. And now there's another threat—and that's Trump," Hedemann said.

He added: "With this lunatic, you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. He can make things very bad for everyone." (AP)

'3,117 were killed in Iranian protests'

Iranian state TV issues first official death toll from recent protests



Protest death toll rises

DUBAI, Jan 22: Iranian state TV on Wednesday issued the first official death toll from recent protests, saying 3,117 people were killed, while the foreign minister issued the most direct threat yet against the United States after Tehran's bloody crackdown, warning the Islamic Republic will be "firing back with everything we have if we come under renewed attack."

State television carried statements by the Interior Ministry and the Martyrs Foundation, an official body providing services to families of those killed in wars, stating the toll and saying 2,427 of the dead in the demonstrations that began Dec. 28 were civilians and security forces. It did not elaborate on the rest. The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said the death toll was at least 4,560. The agency has been accurate throughout the years on demonstrations and unrest in Iran, relying on a network of activists inside the country that confirms all reported fatalities. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll.

The comments by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who saw his invitation to the World Economic Forum in Davos rescinded over the killings, came as a US aircraft carrier group moved west toward the Middle East from Asia. US fighter jets and other equipment appeared to be moving in the Mideast after a major US military deployment in the Caribbean saw troops seize Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro.

tied to Israel and "supported, equipped and armed" by the US. Nearly 26,500 people have been arrested, according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency. Comments from officials have led to fears of some of those detained being put to death in Iran, one of the world's top executioners. That and the killing of peaceful protesters have been two red lines laid down by Trump in the tensions.

Kurdish exiles claim Iranian attack in Iraq

The National Army of Kurdistan, the armed wing of the Kurdistan Freedom Party, or PAK, claimed Iran launched an attack against one of its bases near Irbil, some 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of Baghdad. It said one fighter had been killed, and released mobile phone footage of a fire in the predawn darkness.

Iran did not immediately acknowledge the attack, which would be the first foreign operation Tehran has launched since the protests started.

A handful of Iranian Kurdish dissident or separatist groups—some with armed wings—have long found a safe haven in northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan region, where their presence has been a point of friction between the central government in Baghdad and Tehran. The PAK has claimed it launched attacks in Iran as a crackdown on the demonstrations took place, something reported by semiofficial Iranian news agencies as well. (AP)

British Hindus in Parl Square protest against attacks in Bangladesh

LONDON, Jan 22: British Hindus and Bangladeshi diaspora groups gathered at Parliament Square in London on Wednesday to protest against the persecution of minorities in Bangladesh, calling on the British government to ensure the Mohammad Yunus-led interim government acts to protect innocent lives.

The 'Stand against persecution of minorities in Bangladesh' mass demonstration brought together a diverse set of organisations, including the Bengali Hindu Adarsha Sangha (BHAS) UK, INSIGHT UK and Hindu Council UK.

Families, including young children, gathered on a rainy evening to wave placards that read "#Save-BangladeshiHindus" and "Save Hindus in Bangladesh", as chants of "stop killing Hindus" rang out opposite the Palace of Westminster Parliament complex. Hindu Council UK said in a statement that Bangladesh Hindus are being "killed almost daily on false charges of blasphemy" since the Yunus regime took charge in the country.

The group appealed to UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper to take action against the "heinous Islamist killings of innocent Hindus in Bangladesh as a very serious matter and at the very least leverage the British aid fund to Bangladesh to protect innocent victims there".

INSIGHT UK said the protest at Parliament Square was organised to raise awareness of "ongoing persecution, violence, rape and killings of Hindus and other religious minorities in Bangladesh".

Last week, the UK government condemned "all acts of violence" in Bangladesh and called for peaceful and credible elections as the issue was raised in the House of Commons. Opposition Conservative Party MP Bob Blackman asked the Labour government to intervene to protect minorities and ensure elections scheduled for February are "free and fair". (PTI)

US Senators introduce bipartisan bill to counter China's dominance in critical minerals

WASHINGTON, Jan 22: A bipartisan group of US lawmakers has introduced a bill in the Senate to strengthen domestic and allied supply chains for critical minerals to counter China's monopoly over global markets.

The Securing Essential and Critical Resources and Elements (SECURE) Minerals Act, introduced last week by Republican Senator Todd Young of Indiana and Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, aims at reducing US dependence on China by supporting domestic production, stabilising markets and encouraging long-term investment through policy-backed mechanisms.

The SECURE Act envisages the establishment of a Strategic Resilience Reserve (SRR) in an independent government corporation, run by a seven-member board appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

The SRR would focus on supporting the critical minerals market, including through stable prices, domestic and allied production (including recycling), stockpiles, competitive markets and supply chain work, with minerals where the US is re-

liant on China, the bill said.

"China's global dominance of critical minerals supply chains gives it significant leverage and leaves the US vulnerable to economic coercion. This bipartisan legislation is a historic investment in making the US economy more resilient and supporting good-paying jobs in key sectors like aerospace, autos and technology," Senator Shaheen said in a press release.

Delivering much-needed stability to the market, providing targeted investments and stockpiling key inputs will help insulate the US from foreign threats and will provide a significant, and cost-effective, boost to the American economy, he said.

"For years, China has leveraged its dominance of critical minerals by manipulating global markets and supply chains. Our bill would counter China's ongoing coercion and ensure the United States has a secure and accessible supply of the minerals that power our defence systems and high-tech industries," said Senator Young.

The SRR is a much-needed, aggressive step to protect the US' national and economic security, he said.

According to the mining.com website,

a global source for insights into the mining and metals industry, China currently controls over 60 per cent of the world's mined rare earths and about 90 per cent of their processing. The country also holds a major share of the refined production of lithium, graphite and cobalt, all minerals key to electrification, clean energy and defence.

For lithium, China has created a huge glut that has driven down prices globally, rendering many projects in the West unprofitable. In the rare earth sector, it deployed export curbs that have also resulted in high prices.

The proposed legislation asserted that producers of critical minerals and materials in the US often face artificially low prices set by supply chains controlled by China, discouraging private investment in domestic extraction and processing.

"The lack of transparent, competitive, and market-driven pricing mechanisms for critical minerals and materials outside of the People's Republic of China compounds market problems, creating systemic risk and limiting the viability of an independent supply chain for critical minerals and materials in the US," it said. (PTI)

Danish leader says kingdom can't negotiate sovereignty after Trump's Greenland about-turn

COPENHAGEN (DENMARK), Jan 22: Denmark's prime minister insisted that her country can't negotiate on its sovereignty on Thursday after U.S. President Donald Trump said he agreed a "framework of a future deal" on Arctic security with the head of NATO, and said she has been "informed that this has not been the case."

Trump on Wednesday abruptly scrapped the tariffs he had threatened to impose on eight European nations to press for U.S. control over Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. It was a dramatic reversal hours after he insisted he wanted to get the island "including right, title and ownership"—though he also said he would not use force. He said "additional discussions" on Greenland were being held concerning the Golden Dome missile defense program, a multilayered, \$175 billion system that for the first time will put U.S. weapons in space. Trump offered few details, saying they were still being worked out.

Denmark insists on territorial integrity. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said in a statement Thursday that security in the Arctic is a matter for all of NATO, and it is "good and natural" that it

be discussed between the U.S. president and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte. She said that she had spoken with Rutte "on an ongoing basis," including before and after he met Trump in Davos.

She wrote that NATO is fully aware of the kingdom of Denmark's position that anything political can be negotiated on, including security, investment and economic issues—"but we cannot negotiate on our sovereignty." "I have been informed that this has not been the case," she said, adding that only Denmark and Greenland can make decisions on issues concerning Denmark and Greenland.

Frederiksen said that Denmark wants to continue engaging in constructive dialogue with allies on how to strengthen security in the Arctic, including the U.S. Golden Dome program, "provided that this is done with respect for our territorial integrity."

Asked in an interview with Fox News whether Greenland would remain part of the kingdom of Denmark under the framework deal Trump announced, Rutte replied that "that issue did not come up any more in my conversations tonight with the president." (PTI)

Decision on joining Board of Peace after consultations with strategic partners: Putin

MOSCOW, Jan 22: Russian President Vladimir Putin has said any decision on joining the Board of Peace led by the US to oversee the Gaza ceasefire plan will be taken after consultations with Moscow's strategic partners.

"Regarding our participation in the 'Peace Board', the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instructed to study the documents received by us, consult with our strategic partners on this matter, and only then will we be able to respond to the invitation extended to us," Putin said in his televised opening remarks at the national Security Council meeting late Wednesday night.

"We have always supported and continue to support any efforts aimed at strengthening international stability. We also acknowledge the current US administration's contribution to the search for a solution to the Ukrainian crisis," Putin said, thanking US President Trump for the invitation. The Board of Peace led by Trump was originally envisioned as a small group of world leaders overseeing the Gaza ceasefire plan.

Since then, the Trump administration's ambitions have ballooned into a more sprawling concept, with Trump extending invitations to dozens of nations and hinting the board will soon broker global conflicts,

like a pseudo-UN Security Council.

Putin noted that the proposal made to Russia was primarily about a settlement in West Asia and about finding possible solutions to the pressing problems of the Palestinian people and resolving the most acute humanitarian problems in the Gaza Strip.

"In this regard, I would like to emphasise the most important point. The key is that the entire process should have a positive impact on a long-term settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, based on the relevant decisions of the United Nations.

"And it is essential that the fundamental needs and wishes of the Palestinians be taken into account. This concerns the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and its basic social infrastructure, healthcare systems, water supply, and the establishment of a reliable food supply," Putin said and announced to donate USD 1 billion to the Peace Board.

"Even before we decide on the issue of participation in the composition and work of the Peace Board, taking into account Russia's special relationship with the Palestinian people, we could, I think, give USD 1 billion from Russian assets frozen under the previous US administration," Putin announced. (PTI)

EU leaders gather to chart new course for transatlantic ties after Trump threats over Greenland

BRUSSELS, Jan 22: European Union leaders are gathering for emergency talks on Thursday to chart a new course in transatlantic relations after a tumultuous two weeks dominated by US President Donald Trump's renewed threats to take control of Greenland.

On the eve of their summit, Trump dramatically backed away from his insistence on "acquiring" Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of Denmark. For the first time, he said that he would not use force to seize the island. Trump also dropped his threat of slapping tariffs on eight European nations supporting Denmark.

Yet nothing suggests that the unpredictable US leader won't change his mind again. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen this week cast doubts over his reliability after he appeared ready to renege on an EU-US trade deal sealed in July that was meant to end further tariffs.

"In politics as in business, a deal is a deal. And when friends shake hands, it must mean something," von der Leyen told EU lawmakers on Tuesday.

No details of the hastily agreed "framework" deal that sparked Trump's extraordinary reversal have been made public, and doubts about it persist. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen insists that her country will not negotiate away its sovereignty.

European leaders are also expected to agree on a joint approach to Trump's proposed "Board of Peace," which was initially envisioned as a small group of world leaders overseeing the Gaza ceasefire but has grown into something far more ambitious.

On Thursday, days after telling the prime minister of Norway in a text message that he no longer felt "an obligation to think purely of Peace," Trump put the spotlight on the proposed board at Davos.

Trump has spoken about the



board replacing some of the functions of the United Nations.

Some European countries have declined invitations to join. Norway, Slovenia and Sweden said they won't take part. Told that President Emmanuel Macron was unlikely to join, Trump said: "I'll put a 200 per cent tariff on his wines and champagnes, and he'll join."

Germany has offered a guarded and noncommittal response to Trump's invitation, but Hungary has accepted.

On the eve of the meeting, the man who will chair it, European Council President António Costa, said that the Trump administration poses a challenge to Europe's security, principles and prosperity. "All these three dimensions are being tested in the current moment of transatlantic relations," Costa said. After consulting the leaders, Costa said they are united on "the principles of international law, territorial integrity and national sovereignty," something the EU insists on as it defends Ukraine against Russia, and which Trump has threatened in Greenland.

In a speech to EU lawmakers in Strasbourg, France, he also insisted that "further tariffs would under-

mine transatlantic relations and are incompatible with the EU-US trade agreement." EU lawmakers must endorse that deal, but on Wednesday, they put a hold on their vote over Trump's threats.

EU leaders have been galvanised by Trump's bullying over Greenland, and are rethinking their relations with an unpredictable America, their long-time ally and the most powerful member of NATO.

"Appeasement is always a sign of weakness. Europe cannot afford to be weak—neither against its enemies, nor against its allies," Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a staunch supporter of strong transatlantic ties, posted on social media on Tuesday.

Von der Leyen, who manages trade on behalf of EU countries, warned that the bloc is "at a crossroads." Should tariffs come, she said, "we are fully prepared to act, if necessary, with unity, urgency and determination."

She also told the lawmakers that the commission is working on "a massive European investment surge in Greenland" to beef up its economy and infrastructure, as well as a new European security strategy. (AP)

Scientists eager to understand when did early humans learn to make art Indonesian handprints are the oldest cave art found yet

NEW YORK, Jan 21: Handprints on cave walls in a largely unexplored area of Indonesia may be the oldest rock art studied so far, dating back to at least 67,800 years ago. The tan-coloured prints analysed by Indonesian and Australian researchers on the island of Sulawesi were made by blowing pigment over hands placed against the cave walls, leaving an outline. Some of the fingertips were also tweaked to look more pointed.



This prehistoric art form suggests the Indonesian island was home to a flourishing artistic culture. To figure out how old the paintings were, researchers dated mineral crusts that had formed on top of the art. Upon seeing the new study, independent paleoanthropologist Genevieve von Petzinger said she "let out a little squeal of joy." "It fits everything I'd been thinking," she said.

Indonesia is known to host some of the world's earliest cave draw-

ings, and scientists have analysed countless examples of ancient art across the globe—including simple marks on bones and stones that go back hundreds of thousands of years. Cross-hatched markings on a piece of rock in South Africa have been dated to about 73,000 years ago. The new art from southwestern Sulawesi is the oldest to

found on cave walls. The stencils also represent a more complex tradition of rock art that could have been a shared cultural practice, study author Maxime Aubert with Griffith University, who published the study Wednesday in the journal Nature, said.

Scientists are eager to understand when early humans learned to make art, moving from dots and lines to more meaningful representations of themselves and the world around them. These cave drawings help firm up a timeline for the dawn of human creativity.

It's not yet clear whose hands made the prints. They could be from an ancient human group called Denisovans who lived in the area and may have interacted with our Homo sapiens ancestors before eventually going extinct. Or they may belong to modern humans venturing away from Africa, who could have wandered through the Middle East and Australia around this time. Fine details on the cave art, including the intentionally modified fingertips, point to a human hand.

Other drawings discovered in the same area of the island, including a human figure, a bird and horselike animals, were found to be created much more recently, some of them about 4,000 years ago. (AP)

Guv says celebration strengthens 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' spirit Lok Bhavan celebrates foundation days of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 22: Embodying the true spirit of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', the State Foundation Days of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura were celebrated with traditional gaiety and enthusiasm at Lok Bhavan, Itanagar on 21 January. The occasion turned into a warm celebration of unity, culture and shared heritage among the Northeastern States.

The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), along with the First Lady of the State, Anagha Parnaik, participated in the programme along with people from Ma-

nipur, Meghalaya and Tripura.

Extending his greetings, the Governor conveyed good wishes to the people of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura on behalf of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. He expressed deep affection and admiration for the sister States and acknowledged the enduring bonds of friendship and shared heritage that unite the people of the Northeast.

Recalling the rich histories of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura, the Governor observed that these States share many similarities with Arunachal Pradesh. He said their close association is rooted in a mosaic of cultural diversity, age-old traditions and pris-

tine green landscapes that define the region. These common threads, he added, reflect a shared way of life that values harmony with nature, community living and mutual respect.

The Governor remarked that celebrating the foundation days of other States goes beyond ceremonial observance, as it reinforces the spirit of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' by deepening understanding, fostering unity and strengthening emotional bonds across State boundaries. He also thanked the people of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura for their valuable contributions to the social, cultural and developmental progress of Arunachal

Pradesh and expressed hope that these ties of cooperation and goodwill would continue to grow stronger.

The highlight of the programme was a vibrant showcase of traditional dances and cultural performances presented by participants from Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. The Manipuri community mesmerised the audience with graceful renditions of 'Amabagi Khutsem', 'Khamba Thoibi' and 'Hallaklo', reflecting the elegance, devotion and storytelling heritage of Manipur. Cultural teams from Meghalaya and Tripura, comprising mainly students of the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), presented Rabintra Sangeet Lokgeeti, the energetic 'Hojagiri' folk dance of Tripura's Reang (Bru) tribe and 'Ri Lum', a Khasi song accompanied by a vibrant group dance representing the tribes of Meghalaya.

Children from Gyan Mission attended the programme as special guests of the Governor, adding warmth and joy to the celebration. The Governor and the First Lady later hosted a high tea for the invitees and children, during which they interacted with them, listened to their experiences and encouraged them to pursue their dreams with confidence and determination.

ECI launches ECINET, a one-Stop digital platform for electoral services

Platform integrates 40+ apps to enhance transparency, efficiency and public trust in elections



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 22: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday launched ECINET, its one-stop digital platform for all election-related information and services at the India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026. The three-day conference from January 21-23, 2026, is being held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

ECINET was envisaged by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr Vivek Joshi and its development was announced in May 2025.

Speaking at the launch, CEC Gyanesh Kumar said ECINET has been developed in strict accordance with the law and is available in 22 scheduled languages and English. He invited Election Management Bodies (EMBs) worldwide to collaborate with India on developing similar digital platforms for their countries in line with their respective laws and languages.

EC Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu described ECINET as a powerful tool to enhance trust in EMBs, as it brings greater transparency, facilitates quick decision-making and enables efficient monitoring of all electoral functions. EC Dr Vivek Joshi added that the conference offers EMBs an opportunity to learn from global practices on adopting technology and digital innovations in elections.

During her presentation, Director General of Information Technology, Dr Seema Khanna, highlighted cybersecurity as one of the key pillars of ECINET. She

said that technology is no longer a support function but a strategic enabler and that ECINET strengthens transparency, efficiency, credibility and public trust in elections.

ECINET is the world's largest electoral service platform, integrating over 40 apps and portals of the Election Commission of India to provide a seamless experience for citizens. Developed in full compliance with the Constitution of India, the Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951, the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 and the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, ECINET connects citizens, candidates, political parties and election officials. It offers services such as voter registration, electoral roll search, Track Your Application, Know Your Candidate, Connect with Election Officials, Book-a-Call with BLO, e-EPIC download, polling trends, grievance redressal and more on a secure platform.

The beta version was successfully piloted during the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), enabling the Election Commission to deliver enhanced citizen-centric electoral services. Suggestions from citizens were incorporated before the final launch of the platform.

Since the beta release, ECINET has processed over 10 crore registration forms, averaging 2.7 lakh forms per day. More than 11 lakh Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are registered on the platform and over 150 crore documents have been digitised through the platform during SIR. ECINET also provides a seamless mechanism for monitoring ground-level electoral functionalities.

SIRD&PR launches training for newly elected PRI members in Siang



HT Correspondent

BOLENG, Jan 22: The State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (SIRD&PR), Arunachal Pradesh has commenced the Foundation-cum-Functional Training Programme for Newly Elected Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) Members and Functionaries at the Boleng Community Block in Siang District. The three-day programme was formally inaugurated by Tayi Taggu, Deputy Commissioner, Siang District in the presence of Tamat Tatat, Zilla Parishad Chairperson, Siang, along with other dignitaries, departmental officers and participants comprising newly elected Gram Panchayat Chairpersons (GPCs), Gram Panchayat Members (GPMs) and PRI functionaries.

While addressing the gathering, Tamat Tatat expressed his gratitude to the State Government and SIRD&PR for selecting Siang District as the first district in the State to conduct this important capacity-building programme for newly elected PRI representatives. He urged the participants to make the best use of the training and to build a strong foundation for effective governance and development during their five-year tenure.

In his inaugural address, Deputy Commissioner Tayi Taggu shared his rich experience in rural development, including his tenure as Director, RD. He highlighted that learning is a continuous process and emphasised that age, position, or authority should never hinder one's willingness to learn. He noted that PRI provides an ideal platform for continuous learning, especially with exposure to modern governance systems such as the Mobile Monitoring System, geo-tagging, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), PFMS, online audit and other digital tools. The Deputy Commissioner further stressed that no government scheme can be implemented without proper planning, implementation and monitoring and highlighted the importance of generating Own Source Revenue (OSR) to meet urgent local development needs without solely depending on government funding. Describing the RD & PR Department as a critical department for transforming rural villages, he termed PRI members as key stakeholders and change agents in grassroots development. He also strongly encouraged women representatives, stating that lack of formal education or gender should never be a barrier to participation in Gram Sabha proceedings, decision-making, and scheme monitoring and urged them to manage their Panchayats with the same care and responsibility as their own homes.

On the academic front, SW Bagang, Assistant Director and Core Faculty, SIRD&PR, delivered a session on the overview and historical background of the Panchayati Raj system in India and Arunachal Pradesh, including provisions of the Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, Sijit Kundu, Consultant, NIRD, spoke on the roles and responsibilities of PRIs in strengthening local self-governance and implementing development initiatives. Representatives from the PHE Department, Boleng, presented new initiatives aimed at ensuring water sufficiency in villages, while Jacop Siram, District Nodal Officer, also addressed the participants on the first day.

JAACMAP holds protest march in Itanagar against corruption

Organisation demands transparency, public accountability and social audit

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 22: The Jan Andolan Anti-Corruption Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (JAACMAP) on Wednesday carried out a protest rally in Itanagar city demanding public accountability, transparency and social audit of the State Government and elected representatives.

The protest march began from Akashdeep and culminated at the Tennis Court in IG Park, where hundreds of people from various walks of life gathered for a peaceful rally-cum-dharna. The protesters carried leaflets, posters, banners and placards, raising slogans such as "We don't want corruption" and "We want justice".

Addressing the media, JAACMAP Organising Chairman Nabam Tagam said that the protest rally marked a significant surge of public dissent against corruption. He stated that the organisation is demanding transparency, accountability and a high-level probe into alleged institutionalised corruption within the State Government and among elected leaders. He added that the movement against corruption is not new and has been part of a democratic struggle for decades, but strong action on the ground has been lacking despite repeated allegations of high-level corruption.

Referring to the recent corruption case related to the Frontier Highway Lada-Sarli stretch, Tagam said it was a glaring example where a few people, including officials, have been arrested. He stressed that the investigation should be carried out in the best possible manner and if required, be handed over to a central investigating agency.

Tagam said that the rising incidence of corruption in the sensitive border State of Arunachal Pradesh is a serious concern. He noted that several petitions and PILs have been filed in courts from time to time, but no strong action has been visible so far. He demanded that the courts deliver verdicts based on the findings of investigations conducted by the agencies concerned. He further alleged that several corruption cases, including those related to the Public Distribution System (PDS), Trans-Arunachal Highway compensation scam and the Frontier Highway Lada-Sarli land compensation issue have been brought to the notice of both the State and Central Governments through representations and memorandums, including to the Prime Minister, but effective action to curb corruption has not been taken.

Calling it an eye-opener for all citizens of the State, Tagam appealed to people to unite against corrupt officers, leaders and practices and to work collectively to dismantle the corrupt system for the better development of Arunachal Pradesh. He said the movement, which began in November 2025 but was paused due to Panchayat and municipal elections has resumed and is expected to continue in the coming days with the permission of the Capital administration.

Hundreds of people from different sections of society participated in the protest march under the banner of the Jan Andolan Anti-Corruption Movement of Arunachal Pradesh, reaffirming their resolve to continue the fight against corruption through peaceful and democratic means.

BMS president calls for unity and harmony among workers

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Jan 22: Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS) president Ringu Chapo has appealed to all affiliated organisations to work for unity, communal harmony among the workers' community and the overall development of the state. He made the appeal while taking part in a function held at the BMS office in the city.

Chapo was addressing a felicitation ceremony organised in honour of Arunachal Pradesh Anganwadi Karamchhari Sangh (APAKS) outgoing president Gigi Rena Camdir, who has recently been elected as Corporation from Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) Ward No 18 and the newly appointed

APAKS president Bamang Ani.

While thanking the people of Ward No 18 for electing Gigi Rena Camdir as their representative, Chapo expressed hope that she would work for the welfare of the masses not only in her ward but across the entire Itanagar Capital Complex. He said that BMS is committed to the welfare of the workers' community and that it is both the duty and responsibility of the organisation to work for the welfare of all workers, labourers and mazdoors in the state for a better Arunachal Pradesh.

IMC Corporation and former APAKS president Gigi Rena Camdir thanked all members of the organisation and BMS for their support to

the cause of Anganwadi workers in the state. She assured her continued support to the organisation even while serving as an IMC Corporation. She also congratulated the newly elected APAKS president Bamang Ani.

Newly appointed APAKS president Bamang Ani also addressed the function and sought support from all members of the organisation and the general public to work collectively for the welfare of Anganwadi workers.

BMS leader and APAKS In-charge Tadang Yangfo, APAKS vice president Omen Halley, General Secretary Jikke Yaro, Assistant General Secretary Yarda Mama, among others, also addressed the gathering.

Arunachal minister flags tourism, cultural potential of historic Pangsau Pass

Education Minister says historic border pass can emerge as hub for tourism

ITANAGAR, Jan 22: Arunachal Pradesh Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sonu on Thursday underscored the historical, strategic and tourism significance of Pangsau Pass during his visit to the iconic India-Myanmar border landmark in Changlang district of the state.

Calling it a "gateway between India and Myanmar", Sonu said the pass embodies a rare confluence of history, culture and frontier heritage with strong potential to emerge as a hub for border tourism and cultural exchange.

"Visited the iconic Pangsau Pass, a place of immense historical and strategic significance and one of Arunachal Pradesh's most remarkable border landmarks," Sonu said in a post on X.

Standing at this gateway between India and Myanmar, one truly feels the spirit of connection between nations, cultures and histories, the minister said.

Highlighting its legacy, the minister said the pass is surrounded by



brehtaking landscapes and carries the legacy of the historic Stillwell Road, adding that it remains a symbol of resilience, friendship and frontier heritage.

Emphasising future prospects, Sonu observed that with its unique location and unmatched natural beauty, Pangsau Pass holds immense potential to emerge as a major destination for border

tourism and cultural exchange.

On Wednesday, Sonu attended the Pangsau Pass International Festival at Nampong, which began on January 20, describing the event as a vibrant showcase of the state's cultural diversity.

"Delighted to attend the Pangsau Pass International Festival 2026 at Nampong, a vibrant celebration of Arunachal Pradesh's rich cultural

heritage and the unique spirit of our border region," he said in another social media post.

Praising the performances, Sonu said the festival beautifully showcased the traditions, colours and rhythms of the diverse communities through captivating cultural performances by various troupes.

He said the event stands as a proud platform that strengthens unity and promotes local identity and extended best wishes for the continued success of the festival.

The Pangsau Pass International Festival is held annually near the historic mountain pass to celebrate cross-border ties, indigenous traditions and local livelihoods.

The pass, famed as the eastern gateway of the World War II-era Stillwell Road, has long served as a strategic corridor linking India and Myanmar, symbolising historical cooperation while offering fresh opportunities for tourism, cultural exchange and people-to-people connectivity. (PTI)

Namsai-Pangsau PowerDrive 2026 flagged off in Nampong

HT Correspondent

NAMPONG, Jan 22: The much-anticipated Namsai-Pangsau PowerDrive 2026, themed "Daring to Push Boundaries, Celebrating Boundaries," was officially flagged off on Thursday from Hell Gate, Nampong village, witnessing enthusiastic participation from motorsport athletes across the country.

A total of 35 participants, including 22 superbike riders and 13 high-performance car riders from various parts of India, took part in the opening day, creating a thrilling spectacle for motorsport enthusiasts and local spectators alike. The event was flagged off by Lt General Vikas Lakera, Director General, Assam Rifles, who highlighted the deeper significance of such initiatives.

"Events like this make places relevant. They connect people and build a sense of unity and shared spirit. While it may appear to be a sporting event, it goes much deeper than that. Roads and motors connect nations like arteries, keeping the country united," he said, expressing happiness over the growing scale of motorsport events in Arunachal Pradesh.

The competitive action began with an 11.2 km hill climb stage from Hell Gate to Pangsau Pass at the Indo-Myanmar border.

Hamza Murtaza delivered a commanding performance, clocking a blistering 9 minutes 57 seconds to take an early lead. A local rider followed closely, finishing in 10 minutes 4 seconds, while Mohit Sachdeva completed the stage in 10 minutes 35 seconds finishing the race at Pangsau Pass top of Myanmar border.

Thousands of spectators lined the route leading to Pangsau Pass, cheering the participants and bringing Day One to an electrifying conclusion. Among the senior participants, Dr Gomi from Itanagar, Chief Patron of the Arunachal Superbikes Club, shared his excitement ahead of the race, remarking that "the heart is already pumping" for the PowerDrive challenge. The event will continue tomorrow in Namsai town, where competitors will face off in a 1-kilometre tarmac autocross stage set in the heart of the town, promising another day of high-octane action and public engagement.

Seva Bharati provides blankets to fire-affected KGBV students

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Jan 22: Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh distributed 50 mink blankets among the girl students of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) at Saw Mill, Pasighat, who had suffered losses due to a fire incident in one of the hostel dormitories.

The incident had occurred on Sunday, 18 January 2025, when a fire broke out in a dormitory of the KGBV hostel. The fire was detected at an early stage and was promptly controlled through the combined and courageous efforts of the students and staff members, even before the arrival of the fire force. Although no casualties were reported, the fire caused extensive damage to blankets, bedding materials and other personal belongings of the students. The affected dormitory houses 72 boarders, of whom around 50 students lost their belongings either partially or completely. Taking note of the immediate needs of the students and the hardships faced by them, Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh decided to extend timely humanitarian support. Accordingly, 50 mink blankets were arranged and formally handed over to the affected students by Dr Kaling Jerang, former president and incumbent member of Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh, in the presence of Dipak Borde, senior karyakanta and others.

On the occasion, Head Teacher Rinkoo Upadhyay and Warden Nayang Nonang expressed their sincere gratitude to Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh for its compassionate gesture and timely assistance. Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh reaffirmed its commitment to serve society and stand with children and students during times of distress and emergencies, informed the release from Seva Bharati.

SC allows Hindus, Muslims to offer prayers at Bhojshala on Basant Panchami

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: The Supreme Court has allowed Hindu prayers from sunrise to sunset on Basant Panchami on Friday at the disputed Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, while permitting Muslims to offer namaz from 1 pm to 3 pm on the day.

The top court on Thursday also directed that a list of persons from the Muslim community coming for namaz be given to the district administration.

Hindu and Muslim groups have sought nod for religious activities at the Bhojshala complex on January 23, a Friday when Saraswati Puja will also be held on the occasion of Basant Panchami.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Panchohi made an appeal to both sides to observe mutual respect and cooperate with the state and district administration for maintenance of law and order.

"ASG as well as Advocate General have fairly suggested that, after knowing that how many persons belonging to Muslim community are likely to come tomorrow for namaz between 1 to 3 pm, an exclusive and separate space within the same compound premises shall be made available, so that the namaz can be performed at the prescribed time.

"Similarly, a separate space, as per the past practice, shall be made available to the Hindu community to hold the traditional ceremonies on the occasion of Basant Pan-



chami," the bench said.

It directed the district administration to make law and order arrangements at the site for offering of prayers.

"The district administration may, with a view to ensure maintenance of law and order, issue appropriate passes, free of cost, for the visitors or may adopt any other fair measures to ensure that no untoward incident takes place and the rituals are performed peacefully," the bench said.

Hindus consider Bhojshala, an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected 11th-century monument, to be a temple dedicated to Yagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), while the Muslim community calls it Kamal Maula mosque.

Under an arrangement made by the ASI on April 7, 2003, Hindus perform puja on the Bhojshala premises on Tuesdays and Muslims offer 'namaz' in the complex

on Fridays. The top court was hearing a plea filed by the Hindu Front for Justice seeking exclusive rights for Hindus to offer prayers on Basant Panchami.

The plea filed through advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain was mentioned for urgent hearing on Tuesday.

Jain had said the ASI's 2003 order does not address situations where Basant Panchami coincides with Friday prayers and sought exclusive, uninterrupted worship rights for Hindus for the entire day on Basant Panchami.

During the hearing, Jain submitted that there will be pujas and havans from sunrise to sunset and sought permission for worship throughout the day.

Senior advocate Salman Khurshid, for the mosque committee, submitted that the Friday namaz takes place between 1 PM and 3 PM, and the premises can be va-

cated after that.

Khurshid, while accepting this proposal, stated that the approximate number of persons belonging to Muslim community, who will come for namaz tomorrow will be furnished to the District Magistrate.

Additional Solicitor General KM Nataraj, for the Centre and ASI assured the court that the district administration will take care of the law and order situation.

The top court also disposed of an appeal filed by the Maulana Kamaluddin Welfare Society challenging the March 11, 2024 order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on the "scientific survey" of the complex.

The apex court directed the high court that the matter may be taken up by a division bench headed by one of the senior-most judges of the high court.

Noting that ASI has completed the scientific survey and has submitted its report in a sealed cover to the high court, the top court directed the high court to unseal the report and be supplied to the parties, who can file objections to it. "If such part cannot be copied, the parties may be allowed to inspect in presence of their counsels. Let objections be filed and thereafter case be taken for final hearing.

"Till the writ is finally decided, the parties shall maintain status quo at the site. However, parties shall continue to follow and abide by ASI order of April 2023," the bench said. (PTI)

Farmers have shown the way to workers, poor must unite to bring back MGNREGA: Rahul

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed that the Modi government's objectives in repealing MGNREGA are the same as they were in bringing the "three black farm laws", and urged workers to take a cue from farmers and stand united to demand the rollback of VB-G RAM G Act.

Addressing the National MGNREGA Workers' Convention organised by the Rachnatmak Congress, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said the concept of MGNREGA was to give rights to the poor.

Workers from across the country participated in the convention, bringing a fistful of soil from their work sites that was put in plants as a symbolic gesture in the presence of Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge.

"The MGNREGA movement is a big opportunity for the poor people who believe in the Constitution and the idea of India, that if they stand together, (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi ji will back off and MGNREGA would be reinstated," Gandhi said at the event that was attended by Congress general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal, as well as Rachnatmak Congress chairperson Sandeep Dikshit, among others.

"The thinking behind it was that anyone in need of work could demand work with dignity. MGNREGA was run through the third tier of system - the Panchayat Raj system. MGNREGA had the voice of the people, their rights, poor people were given right to work, a concept which Narendra Modi-BJP is now trying to finish off," Gandhi alleged.

Recalling the farm laws brought by the Modi government in 2020 and repealed the next year, Gandhi said a few years ago the BJP had attacked farmers.

"The Modi government had brought in black laws against farmers, which the farmers managed to stop. I remember, in Parliament and in streets, along with farmers, we put pressure on the government and got those laws repealed," he said.

Gandhi claimed that the same concept that the government ap-



plied to farmers, it is now trying to do on workers.

The idea is that the central government in Delhi will decide how much money to send to which state, Gandhi said and claimed that more money will go to BJP-ruled states and less to opposition-ruled states.

"The central government alone will decide when and where work will happen, and how much wages a worker will get. The rights of workers have been finished and what workers used to get will now go to the contractors and bureaucracy," the former Congress chief claimed.

Gandhi alleged that all the policies of the BJP are aimed at concentrating the country's wealth and property in the hands of a chosen few, and that those same people should run this country.

"The BJP's ideology is that all the country's wealth should go into the hands of the rich, so that the poor, mostly Dalits, OBC, and tribal people, become dependent on rich people like Adani-Ambani and obey their word and if they don't, then they die hungry," he said.

Gandhi pointed out that in the last Lok Sabha election he had stated that the BJP is attacking the Constitution.

"Farm laws were an attack on the Constitution, so was demonetisation, flawed GST. What is the name of this new law ...I don't know," he said with some in the audience responding with the VB-G RAM G acronym.

The former Congress chief said

the idea of the BJP is to finish off the Constitution, democracy and the concept of "one person-one vote".

"These people want to bring back the India of pre-independence where one King used to decide everything, had all the assets and did as he pleased. Their intention is not to stop because they want to change the structure of modern India," Gandhi alleged.

"There is only one way to stop them, workers have been shown the way by farmers. If we stand together unitedly, they are cowardly people...I know them well, they are cowardly and if we stand together, you can decide the name of the scheme and its modalities. But there is one shortcoming and that is of unity," he said.

"Poor people don't stand together, but will have to now. The MGNREGA movement is a big opportunity that the poor people who believe in the Constitution and the idea of India, if they stand together, Modi ji will back off and MGNREGA would be reinstated," he said. The Congress launched 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram', a 45-day nationwide campaign against the repeal of the UPA-era Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), on January 10. The opposition party is demanding the withdrawal of the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act and restoration of MGNREGA as a rights-based law in its original form, the right to work and the authority of panchayats. (PTI)

8 Naxals estimated dead in Jharkhand anti-Naxal operation

RANCHI/NEW DELHI, Jan 22: At least eight Maoists are said to have been killed on Thursday during a large-scale anti-Naxal operation being undertaken by multiple teams comprising 1,500 personnel from CRPF's CoBRA commando unit in Jharkhand, officials said.

The exchange of fire that began around 6:30 am in the Saranda forests of Kiriburu in West Singhbhum district is still on. It is estimated that at least eight Naxals have been killed by noon but their bodies have not yet been recovered, they told PTI. A group of Maoist leader Patiram Manjhi alias Anal is engaged with the teams of the 209th battalion of the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA). As many as 1,500 CoBRA and CRPF personnel, along with some Jharkhand police personnel, are part of the operation, they said.

The operation has been on since Tuesday in the Saranda forests area but the exchange of fire began in the Kiriburu area on Thursday morning. Jharkhand Police Inspector General (operations) Michael Raj S had told PTI in the morning that "intermittent firing is continuing from both sides.

The CRPF has moved more than 600 commandos from its 209, 205 and 203 CoBRA battalions, as well as heavy vehicles, satellite phones, drones and other combat equipment from neighbouring Chhattisgarh for this operation.

Three helicopters have been stationed at Ranchi for evacuation operations, officials said. The CoBRA is CRPF's special jungle warfare force. "A group of about 10-15 Naxals has been engaged with the CoBRA units and more details are expected to come by the evening," a senior officer said.

The operation is part of the Union government's declaration of ending Left Wing Extremism (LWE) from the country by March this year. (PTI)

EC allots 'whistle' symbol for Vijay's TVK, party expresses joy

CHENNAI, Jan 22: The EC has allotted 'whistle' as the symbol for actor-politician Vijay's TVK and enthusiastic party workers have already taken it across the state, senior leader CTR Nirmal Kumar said on Thursday.

The whistle symbol was 'priority' one as preferred by Vijay from a choice of 10 symbols proposed, Kumar, joint general secretary of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam

said. "The overall expectations and the desire of the people of Tamil Nadu is that our leader should become the Chief Minister. As a first step, this symbol has been given," he told reporters here. "The symbol has reached across Tamil Nadu with TVK workers enthusiastically taking it across the state," he added.

Two years after the launch of the party, the 2026 Assembly polls will

be the first electoral battle of the 50-year-old Vijay-helmed TVK, Kumar said, expressing confidence of the party securing a massive win and Vijay becoming CM.

Incidentally, one of actor Vijay's top hit songs is "whistle podu," (play the whistle) from his 2024 film GOAT, which had some references to his then planned political foray. He had acted in a film titled 'Bigil,' which also means whistle. (PTI)

10 soldiers killed, 11 injured as Army vehicle plunges into gorge in J-K's Doda

BHADERWAH/JAMMU, Jan 22: An Army truck skidded off the road and plunged into a deep gorge in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, killing 10 soldiers and injuring 11 others, officials said.

The accident took place at the 9000-foot-high Khanni top along Bhaderwah-Chamba interstate road around noon when the driver of the bulletproof Army vehicle, Casspir, heading towards a high-altitude post lost control and the vehicle plunged into a 200-foot-deep gorge.

A joint rescue operation by Army and police was immediately launched and four of the soldiers were found dead on the spot and 11 others were rescued in an injured condition, the officials said. The Army vehicle was badly mangled after plunging down.

Later, six more injured soldiers succumbed to injuries. One of the injured is under observation in Bhaderwah sub-district hospital while 10 soldiers were airlifted to Udhampur command hospital for specialised treatment while one is under observation in Bhaderwah sub-district hospital. "We have lost 10 soldiers with 11 others injured in the unfortunate accident involving army vehicle," Additional Deputy Commissioner, Bhaderwah, Sumit Kumar Bhutyal told PTI.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has expressed grief over the accident.

The chief minister conveyed heartfelt condolences to the families of the soldiers who lost their lives and wished a speedy recovery to those injured. Abdullah also lauded the swift rescue and evacuation efforts.

LG Sinha, n a post on X, said he was "deeply saddened at the loss of lives of 10 of our brave Indian Army soldiers in an unfortunate road accident in Doda. We will always remember the outstanding service and supreme sacrifice of our brave soldiers." He expressed his deepest condolences to the grieving families.

"In this moment of profound sorrow, the entire nation stands united with the bereaved families in solidarity and support. 10 injured soldiers have been airlifted to the hospital," the LG said, adding he had directed the senior officials to ensure best possible treatment. "Praying for their speedy recovery," he said. (PTI)

Mumbai to have woman mayor from general category; Oppn claims lottery 'fixed'

MUMBAI, Jan 22: Mumbai's next mayor will be a woman from the general category, as determined by a lottery held on Thursday, an official said, even as the Opposition alleged the procedure was "fixed" to suit the ruling parties.

The Shiv Sena (UBT)'s hopes of securing the Mumbai mayoral post were dashed after the lottery draw, as it had pinned its chances on the possibility of the post being reserved for a Scheduled Tribe (ST) woman, as both eligible candidates in that category belonged to Udhav Thackeray's party.

In the January 15 elections, the BJP won 89 seats in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), while the Shiv Sena led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde secured 29, taking the alliance past the halfway mark of 114 required to control India's largest and richest civic body.

The Shiv Sena (UBT), which ruled the civic body for 25 years since 1997 as an undivided political party, won 65 seats, while its allies, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar), won 6 and 1 seat, respectively.

As per the draw of lots, eight other civic bodies in Maharashtra --- Pune, Dhule, Nanded-Waghala, Navi Mumbai, Malegaon, Mira-Bhayander, Nagpur and Nashik --- will also have women mayors from the general category.

The lottery determines the category for which the mayor's post will be reserved, such as general, women, SC, ST, and OBC categories. Once the category is announced, eligible candidates file their nominations.

State Urban Development Department, headed by Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, conducted the lottery for the mayoral posts in Mumbai and 28 other civic bodies, where the elections were held on January 15.

The draw for Mumbai dashed hopes of Shiv Sena (UBT), as after the civic election results last week, former state chief minister and Sena (UBT) head Udhav Thackeray said that "if God is willing", the city will have a mayor from his party.

The Sena (UBT) hoped that luck would have fared if the draw determined a ST woman for the top post in the BMC. There are only two ST category women candidates, both from Thackeray's party.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and former Mumbai mayor Kishori Pednekar opposed the lottery procedure, claiming that the rules to arrive at the decision were changed without informing anyone.

She said the last two city mayors were from the general category, so the new mayor should have been from the Other Backward Classes (OBC). Pednekar also alleged that the ST category was excluded from the lottery system.

"We condemn the way the procedure (of lottery) was conducted. The procedure was fixed," Pednekar charged.

Congress Legislature Party leader Vijay Wadetiwar also alleged the lottery system was "fixed" and done in an opaque manner.

However, Minister of State for Urban Development, Madhuri Misal, rejected the charge. "We completed the procedure as per the law," she asserted.

As per the lottery, eight other civic bodies will have mayors from general category (which could also include women). These are Chhatrapati Sambhajanagar, Parbhani, Sangli-Mira-Kupwad, Amravati, Vasai-Virar, Solapur, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Bhiwandi-Nizampur.

Thane will have a mayor from the Scheduled Caste category, while Jalgaon, Chandrapur, Ahilyanagar and Akola municipal corporations will have women mayors from the OBC category, an official said. (PTI)

Will take up issue of MGNREGA repeal: Kharge

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday alleged that the repeal of MGNREGA by the government was an attempt to remove Mahatma Gandhi's name from public memory and asserted that his party will strongly raise the issue during Parliament's upcoming Budget session.

Addressing the National MGNREGA Workers' Convention organised by the Rachnatmak Congress, Kharge said people must unite and not let the government implement the new law.

He said the MGNREGA repeal was aimed at removing Mahatma Gandhi's name from public memory and weakening the concept of Gram Swaraj.

"In the Budget session, we will fight for this issue," Kharge said, slamming the government for repealing MGNREGA.

Workers from across the country participated in the convention, bringing a fistful of soil from their work sites that was put in plants as a symbolic gesture in the presence of Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. The Congress launched 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram', a 45-day nationwide campaign against the repeal of the UPA-era Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), on January 10. (PTI)

Relief for 50 Jammu medical college students as CM says issue resolved

JAMMU, Jan 22: In a major relief for the 50 students affected by the revocation of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence, the Jammu and Kashmir Board of Professional Entrance Examinations has set January 24 as the fresh date for their counselling to adjust them in seven government-run colleges across the Union Territory.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said the government has resolved the college allocation issue for the selected MBBS candidates of the medical college.

"With BOPEE now issuing the counselling schedule, the selected candidates can move ahead with their studies," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said on X.

According to a notification issued by the controller of examinations of the BOPEE, Prof Gurbinder Raj Verma, the 50 supernumerary seats shall be distributed strictly based on the NEET-UG merit of the candidates

concerned and their preferences among the seven newly established government medical colleges.

The notification said eight students would be allotted seats in GMC Anantnag and seven each in GMC Baramulla, Doda, Handwara, Kathua, Rajouri and Udhampur.

"Pursuant to Health and Medical Education Department communication of January 21, it is hereby notified that the concerned candidates who were provisionally allotted seats in different rounds of counselling by the Board for admission to the MBBS course in SMVDIME, Katra... The Board shall conduct the physical round of counselling to accommodate the students to the GMC within J-K against the supernumerary seats so created," it said.

The Board has scheduled the counselling for January 24 at its offices in the twin capitals of Srinagar and Jammu. It asked the candidates who are unable to at-

tend the session in person to authorise a blood relative, in the format prescribed by the Board, to participate on their behalf. It asserted that the representative must carry the authorisation letter and a valid ID, including an Aadhaar Card.

Supernumerary seats are extra, additional seats created in educational programs beyond the normal intake, often to ensure representation for specific groups.

Earlier this month, the National Medical Commission's Medical Assessment and Rating Board withdrew the letter of permission granted to SMVDIME for non-compliance with minimum standards.

It had said that those admitted to the college during the counselling shall be accommodated in other institutions in Jammu and Kashmir as supernumerary seats.

Sangharsh Samiti, a recently formed conglomerate of right-wing organisations backed by the BJP, has been spearheading an ag-



itation in Jammu since November last year, demanding cancellation of admissions to the college and seeking reservation of seats exclusively for students professing faith in Mata Vaishno Devi.

The Board had earlier said it cannot conduct fresh counselling for MBBS admissions and that the allocation of supernumerary seats

to those who were admitted to the SMVDIME should be decided at the government level.

The clarification came in a letter to the Union Territory's Health and Medical Education Department, which sought its intervention in the relocation of students of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence (SMVDIME).

In a letter to the Jammu and Kashmir Health and Medical Education Department on Wednesday, an under-secretary level officer of the Board said, "I am directed to submit that the matter was placed before the Board for detailed deliberations and it has observed that it is constrained to conduct any new counselling for the year 2025-26 as it is not mandated go beyond the counselling schedule issued by Medical Counselling Committee (MCC), MoHFW, New Delhi for current academic session."

It said that under the directions of the MCC, the data of 1,410 MBBS candidates, including 50 candidates of the SMVDIME under question, has been updated on their portal on the last date of joining on December 31, 2025.

"Further, the creation and allotment of supernumerary seats does not fall within the ambit of J-K BOPEE."

Therefore, the fresh allocation of supernumerary seats to these

candidates who were earlier allotted SMVDIME be made at the government level in consultation with the National Medical Commission and respective medical colleges in Jammu and Kashmir, the letter said.

Among the inaugural batch of 50 students at the SMVDIME, 42 were Muslims -- mostly from Kashmir -- along with seven Hindu students from Jammu and one Sikh candidate, a composition that triggered demands for scrapping the admissions and reserving all seats for Hindu students.

On January 8, the chief minister asserted that the education of the 50 students will not be allowed to suffer, and his government will accommodate them in other institutions through supernumerary seats.

"It is our legal responsibility to accommodate them. We will adjust them by creating supernumerary seats in colleges close to their homes so that their education does not suffer," he had said. (PTI)

Fresh escalation of tensions in Manipur

Meitei man shot dead in Kuki-majority Churachandpur

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, Jan 22: A man belonging to the Meitei community was shot dead after being abducted by suspected Kuki militants in Churachandpur district, in a fresh escalation of the tensions in restive Manipur, police said on Thursday.

Mayanglambam Rishikanta Singh was abducted from his home in the Tuibong area on Wednesday and shot dead in the vicinity of Natjang village, a senior officer said.

The kidnapers are suspected to be members of the United Kuki National Army (UNKA), a non-signatory to the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement.

The SoO pact was signed between the Centre, the Manipur government and dozens of Kuki-Zo militant groups.

Singh, who hailed from Kakching Khunou in Kakching district, was married to Chingnu Haokip of Churachandpur and assumed a tribal name, Ginminthang. He returned to Churachandpur from

Nepal on January 19, according to local sources. He was allowed to stay with his wife, a Kuki, by some local groups, they said.

The deceased's father Mayanglambam Tombi Singh told reporters, "After arriving from Nepal, he had been staying in Churachandpur for a few weeks at his wife's place. He never informed of his whereabouts. We have been told that he was abducted by three armed men on Wednesday evening. His wife was also taken with him, but was later pushed out from a moving vehicle."

Protests erupted in Kakching district on Thursday as people in Kakching Khunou Lamkhai area burnt tyres on roads, stopped vehicles and staged a sit-in against the killing of the Meitei man.

Demonstrations were also held in parts of Wangkhei in Imphal East district, condemning the killing.

Kukis and Meiteis do not venture into each other's areas after the violence broke out in May 2023, leaving the state deeply divided on ethnic



Lines. Over 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the hostilities.

The militants abducted both the man and his wife, and took them towards Natjang in the Henglep police station area, where he was suspected to be shot dead, the officer said.

The wife was later set free, he said.

A purported video clip of the chilling incident went viral on social media, showing Singh beg-

ging for his life with folded hands before he was shot by the armed men.

The body recovered from the Natjang village was brought to the morgue of the district hospital around 1.30 am, the police said.

A suo motu case was registered, and efforts are underway to nab those involved, the officer said.

BJP state unit president Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi condemned the killing of the Meitei man and said acts of violence have no place in society.

Devi, in a post on X, said, "I condemn the tragic killing of Mayanglambam Rishikanta Singh, son of Mayanglambam Tombi Singh of Kakching Khunou, allegedly by anti-national elements. Such acts of violence have no place in our society and go against the values of peace, harmony, and humanity."

She also appealed to "all sections of society to remain united, uphold the rule of law, and work collectively to strengthen our social fabric and ensure a peaceful and secure future for all".

Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity Convenor Y Dhiren told reporters, "We strongly condemn the killing by Chin-Kuki narco terrorists. For many months, we have been trying to restore peace by communicating with different communities. It is very unfortunate that the criminal acts of Kuki militants are not being controlled but rather allowed."

The Joint Action Committee, formed in connection with the killing, demanded immediate arrests of those involved in the criminal activity and handing over the case to the National Investigation Agency.

JAC convenor Khumukcham Pradeep Kumar claimed, "The government is not able to control armed miscreants, and thus the administration of the state should be handed over to a popular government."

He also said joint protests would be held with other civil society groups in the state if the demands are not met. (PTI)

Nagaland reiterates ban on forest fire

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Jan 22: Nagaland fire & emergency services department on Thursday reiterated the total ban on forest fire in the state. In a circular, the directorate of fire & emergency services said during this dry and windy season, it has been observed that the rampant indiscriminate burning of forest by hunters, campers ad miscreants continue to exist in the state despite the best effort by the fire fighters of fire and emergency services and village volunteers with the support of the district administration and police to counter the forest fire from reaching the residential area.

The department pointed out that the state witnessed 188 cases of forest fire during 2025, with Kohima district alone accounting for 91 cases which is a serious concern.

The circular reiterated that the department cannot attend to all forest fires unless they are alarming near human settlement areas.

The circular said the state government, district administration and forest department had been issuing notifications from time to time regarding the total banning of forest fire and its consequences on the ecological balance.

The department urged the public and village councils to take proactive measures to prevent such practice of indiscriminate burning and also impose actions on such miscreants to deter such practice.

Woman rescued by Khasi students

SHILLONG, Jan 22: The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) Delhi unit has rescued a young woman from Meghalaya who was being trafficked and allegedly assaulted by a group of men, allegedly involved in a brothel, at her residence in Delhi.

Marbiang Khongwir, president of the KSU Delhi unit, said, "We received a distress call from the woman's sister, who reported that her sister was being harassed and assaulted by a group of men in her residence. We immediately alerted SPUNER and the Malviya Nagar police, who reached the location and rescued the woman."

Khongwir said that upon investigation, it was revealed that the woman had come to Delhi seeking employment but was coerced into the flesh trade. The accused, who was running a brothel, allegedly assaulted her when she refused to work. "The man who assaulted her is running a brothel. Just because she refused to work, she was assaulted and the man threatened to kill her," Khongwir said. Both the victim and the accused are currently in police custody. The KSU Delhi unit said it is working with the authorities to ensure the woman's safe return to her home state after completing the necessary legal procedures.

Facility to produce value-added products from banana pseudostems inaugurated in Tripura

AGARTALA, Jan 22: A common facility centre was inaugurated for converting banana pseudostems into value-added products, such as fibre, liquid fertiliser and vermicompost, in West Tripura district on Thursday, officials said.

Speaking at the programme, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) Joint Secretary Angshuman Dey said the farmers can bring their waste banana pseudostems to the CFC at Lefunga and get high-value fibre after processing.

The North East Centre for Technology Application and Research (NECTAR) under the Ministry of DoNER has implemented the project to use banana pseudostems for making value-added products.

The value-added products include fibre, liquid fertiliser, vermicompost,

Union Minister Scindia to arrive today in Tripura for three day visit

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 22: Tripura Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury on Tuesday informed that Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia will arrive in Tripura on Friday for a three-day official tour of the state starting from January 23.

Minister said that during the visit, the Union Minister will lay foundation stones for several development projects sponsored by the DoNER Ministry.

"He is also scheduled to hold a meeting with Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, following which both leaders will visit various locations in the state. Scindia will attend a programme at Rabindra Shatabarshiki Bhawan during his stay", said minister Chowdhury.

On the 24th, the Union Minister will visit the Tripura Sundari Temple, where he will inspect ongoing works under tourism development projects and offer

prayers.

"On the 25th, Scindia will visit Kadamtala in North Tripura district to inaugurate the Agar Cluster Processing Centre at Baragole. From there, he will proceed to Unakoti to review the overall development and tourism-related initiatives at the heritage site. Later, he will visit Narkel Kunja at the Dumboor Reservoir, where he is scheduled to stay overnight", said the minister.

The tourism minister said that the DoNER Ministry has sanctioned funds for the development of the Mata Bari Circuit under the tourism sector, and the Union Minister will lay foundation stones for some components of this project during his visit.

Scindia will depart for Guwahati on the evening of the 25th. Ahead of the visit, a preparatory meeting has already been held to ensure smooth execution of the Union Minister's tour programme.

Tripura to begin paddy procurement at revised MSP from Jan 28, to purchase 18,000 mt paddy

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Jan 22: The Tripura government will procure 18,000 metric tonnes of paddy during the ongoing procurement season starting January 28, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Sushanta Chowdhury announced on Thursday.

Speaking to the media, Chowdhury said the Food, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department conducts paddy procurement at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) twice a year. He added that regular procurement has been ensured since the present government came to power, in line with its electoral commitments.

The procurement process will commence at Dharmanagar in North

Tripura district.

Chowdhury also informed that the MSP for paddy has been revised upward from Rs 23 to Rs 23.69 per kilogram.

Highlighting the government's performance, the minister said that between 2018 and now, the state has procured a total of 2,44,303 metric tonnes of paddy, benefiting nearly 1.25 lakh farmers.

An amount of Rs489.71 crore has been spent on procurement during this period.

Chowdhury criticized previous administrations for failing to provide timely support to farmers, alleging that a lack of clear policy had created uncertainty.

He said the current government has introduced a new procurement policy aligned with

practices followed in other states to protect farmers' interests.

Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath said the move is aimed at boosting and eventually doubling farmers' income.

He noted that the average monthly income of farmers, which stood at Rs 6,580 in 2015-16, has now risen to Rs 13,590.

Nath further stated that the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is closely linked to agricultural productivity, and the government is working continuously towards overall development under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He also pointed out that paddy production in Tripura has shown steady growth over the years.

Forest fire continues in Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary

GANGTOK, Jan 22: A forest fire continued to rage inside Sikkim's Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary along the Indo-China border at an altitude of 13,000 feet for the past two days, forest officials said on Thursday.

The fire, which broke out on January 20, has already affected nearly 12 hectares of forest land, conservator of forests (Wildlife) Udai Gurung said.

He said the fire remained uncontrolled due to steep terrain, strong winds

and restricted access in Army zones. The official said prolonged dry weather and lack of snowfall had worsened the situation. Teams from the fire and departments, Army and local volunteers were on the ground, he added. The official said there was no loss of life or property so far as there were no houses, army bunkers or barracks in the area. It may be informed that on January 18, a forest fire at Thambi Dara near Nathula was contained within a day of operations. (PTI)



yarn, fabric, and biodegradable paper.

Currently, pseudostems are discarded by farmers after collecting bananas due to a lack of facilities for reusing the waste.

"The CFC will be beneficial for the farmers as they can earn a sustainable livelihood by selling fibre to the potential buyers. This will be in addition to their income from selling bananas",

he said.

Asserting that the initiative is a strong example of a 'waste to wealth' approach, he said community participation is important to make the CFC successful.

Dey said the DoNER ministry has been funding many projects to bridge gaps in the development process.

NECTAR Director General Arun Kumar Sarma highlighted the idea of setting up CFC at Lefunga and its impact on the local people.

According to Sarma, the liquid fertiliser has a demand for organic farming.

"We have 25,000 organic farmers registered with us in the northeast and 5000 in Tripura. They use organic fertilisers to get a better price. At least 20 persons will get direct employment at the CFC," he said. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF SCHOOL:: KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT CIRCLE,

DIPHU

No. IS/Sec. Teacher/Appt./2025/ 988

Dated Diphu the 22/01/2026.

NOTICE

In continuation of this office previous advertisement notice no. IS/Sec. Teacher/ Appt./ 2025/01 Dated Diphu the 24th December, 2025, IS/Sec. Teacher/ Appt./ 2025/ 02 Dated Diphu the 24th December, 2025 and IS/Sec. Teacher/ Appt./ 2025/ 03 Dated Diphu the 24th December, 2025 which was published in highly circulated daily local newspaper, it is for information to all concerned that the last date for submission of applications for the following mentioned posts under Secondary Education Department, KAAC is hereby extended up to 10th February, 2026 during office hours.

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No., Name of post, Pay Band, Grade Pay, No. of Posts. Lists Graduate Teacher (Arts), Graduate Teacher (Science), Graduate Teacher (Hindi), Assamese Language Teacher (Sr.) with their respective pay bands and number of posts.

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No., Name of post, Pay Band, Grade Pay, No. of Posts. Lists Intermediate Teacher (Arts), Intermediate Teacher (Science), Hindi Teacher (Junior) with their respective pay bands and number of posts.

Table with 5 columns: Sl. No., Name of post, Pay Band, Grade Pay, No. of Posts. Lists Subject Teacher (Accountancy), Subject Teacher (Assamese), Subject Teacher (Botany), Subject Teacher (Business Studies), Subject Teacher (Commercial Mathematics), Subject Teacher (Economics), Subject Teacher (Education), Subject Teacher (English), Subject Teacher (History), Subject Teacher (Mathematics), Subject Teacher (Physics), Subject Teacher (Political Science), Subject Teacher (Zoology) with their respective pay bands and number of posts.

Sd/- Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong District Circle, Diphu.

NETFLIX REVEALS FIRST LOOK OF BEEF SEASON 2



Netflix has revealed the first look images for Beef Season 2, confirming the popular anthology series will return on April 16, with an all-new story and cast. The announcement of the series' worldwide streaming premiere is accompanied by a series of teaser images that highlight the series' change in tone and locale, indicating new interpersonal issues and dramatic tension.

Oscar Isaac, Carey Mulligan, Charles Melton, and Cailce Spaeny play the primary roles in the second instalment, which is supported by an expanded cast. Fans of the Emmy-winning first season can expect a unique storyline that preserves the show's nuanced emotional complexity and keen character interactions.

Netflix shared the first look of Beef Season 2 on Instagram by writing, "Every relationship has its BEEF. Here's your first look at Season 2, premiering April 16. Starring Oscar Isaac, Carey Mulligan, Cailce Spaeny, Charles Melton, Youn Yuh Jung, and Song Kang Ho."

Watch the first look images of Beef season 2 here:

Starry Cast and Fresh Narrative Direction
Netflix's official first look images reveal the primary cast and tone for Beef Season 2. Leading the group is Oscar Isaac as Joshua Maria, a character entangled in the high-stakes social milieu of an exclusive country club, while Carey Mulligan co-stars as his wife, Lindsay Crane-Martin. Charles Melton and Cailce Spaeny play a young couple who accidentally become entangled in their bosses' dysfunctional relationship.

The released images allude to new levels of interpersonal tension and tone, such as Melton's character lifting weights, Spaeny in a worried moment from a hospital setting, Isaac driving a golf cart, and Mulligan considering undergoing a cosmetic makeover.

Country Club Conflict and Supporting Ensemble

The Season 2 plot is set against the exclusive context of a Southern California country club, departing from the road-rage drama of the first season. The main conflict is on a Gen-Z couple who witness a heated altercation between their millennial employers, which sets off a sequence of calculated interpersonal actions inside the social hierarchy of the club.

Oscar winner Yuh-Jung Youn plays Chairwoman Park in Season 2, while Song Kang-ho from 'Parasite' plays Dr Kim. The Emmy-winning anthology series enters the exclusive world of a country club, where its Korean billionaire owner is surrounded by "chess moves of favours and coercion."

William Fichtner as Troy, Mikaela Hoover as Ava, and BM as Woosh are also members of the recurring cast. According to Variety, the season will have eight 30-minute episodes, with Lee Sung Jin, the creator, returning as executive producer and showrunner.

Beef finally returns more than three years after Season 1 premiered, which followed two strangers' lives becoming critically intertwined following a road rage incident. Ali Wong and Steven Yeun played the lead roles in Season 1. (PTI)

HE UNDERSTANDS MY PASSIVE-AGGRESSION: VISHAL BHARDWAJ ON WORKING WITH SHAHID KAPOOR

Filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj, who has reunited with Shahid Kapoor for his new movie "O Romeo", on Wednesday said his partnership with the Bollywood star is similar to the creative bond shared by legendary music composer duos Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Kalyanji-Anandji.

The upcoming film marks the fourth collaboration for Kapoor and Bhardwaj after having previously worked on "Kaminey", "Haider", and "Rangoon".

Bhardwaj said Kapoor is one of the finest actors in his generation and added that he has inherited the depth from his actor parents, Pankaj Kapur and Neelima Azeem.

"Shahid understands my passive-aggression, and that I'm a very difficult man to work with. Shahid should get a National Award for doing four films with me. We complement each other."

"We also have many fights and those fights are known to the media more, but there aren't that many fights between us. We've formed a bond between us like Laxmikant-Pyarelal, like Kalyanji-Anandji," the director said at the trailer launch of "O Romeo".

Bhardwaj said while audiences clearly feel a special chemistry in his collaborations with Kapoor, he himself doesn't know why it works so well.

"I still don't understand the reason why this magic is created. Just like wind is not visible to us but it is there, this magic that is created in our work, I don't know why and how it happens," Bhardwaj said.

Kapoor said working with Bhardwaj is like going on an "adventurous and crazy" journey.

"When I got to work with Vishal sir for the first time, I was very intimidated. I asked him, 'Sir, why are you taking me for this role? I've not done anything to deserve this.' He said, 'I feel you can do it', that's how 'Kaminey' happened and we started working since then."

"After that he gave me 'Hamlet' in 'Haider', which is a role every actor in the world knows is the most intimidating role. Then we did 'Rangoon' and now 'O Romeo'. I feel fortunate to be a part of his filmography," the actor said.

But for "O Romeo", Kapoor revealed, it was producer Sajid Nadiadwala who approached him and not Bhardwaj.

The acclaimed filmmaker interjected, saying he had reached out to the actor who chose



not to respond to his message. Kapoor then said, "Sir, it's possible that I might not have."

Bhardwaj further praised Kapoor, saying the actor has matured not only as a performer but also as a technician. He also believes that the actor is capable of directing a film.

"We've known each other for many years now and we know what are the things that we like and dislike. I think if he ever directs, he will make a very good film. He has that in him. So, Shahid has contributed more than an actor this time. And the rest of the understanding (bit), he is a very difficult man (to understand)," he said. On a query about portrayal of violence and expletives in films, Bhardwaj said cinema is a reflection of society.

"I feel instead of using beep, we should use it (abuses) as it is, because as a society we are very hypocritical people. We are okay when people abuse on the road but when we show it in the cinema (there's an issue), it's like cinema does all the bad things. 'The reality is that cinema shows you the mirror. Today, if violence is happening (in cinema), then the violence exists in society as well now.'"

On a lighter note, the director revealed that he was a bit hesitant to approach the veteran actor Farida Jalal with a role where her character abuses his grandson, played by Kapoor.

"I told Farida ji in this film, there will be a bit of a language issue and she asked, 'Kya

hai? Bahut kharab toh nahi hai?' and I replied, 'It is all (needed) for the character'. Farida ji accepted the role and she played with utmost dedication and that line is viral," Bhardwaj said. Jalal, 76, thanked the filmmaker for offering her a role in "O Romeo" and said, "As far as hurling abuses is concerned, I didn't want to limit myself. I did it all from my heart." "O Romeo" boasts of an ensemble cast that also includes Triptii Dimri, Nana Patekar, Avinash Tiwary, Tamannaah Bhatia, Farida Jalal, Disha Patani, with Vikrant Massey in a special appearance.

This is the third movie between Dimri and Tiwary after "Laila and Majnu" "Bulbul" and the two actors are thrilled to be working with each other again.

Dimri credited Tiwary for pushing her to undertake training in acting during the filming of "Laila Majnu". "I was so nervous that I felt acting is not my cup of tea and he said, 'You should give it a try' and advised me to go to an acting workshop. And that workshop changed my life," she said.

Tiwary said he was "surprised" to see Dimri's transformation as an actor.

"It has been a great working relationship, I hope it continues that way," he said.

Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, the movie is slated for a theatrical release on February 13 during Valentine's week. (PTI)

NIMRAT KAUR MARKS 10 YEARS OF AIRLIFT WITH BTS PICS; CALLS THE FILM 'CELLULOID MAGIC': SEE POST

Actor Nimrat Kaur took a nostalgic trip on Thursday as she marked 10 years since the release of her film Airlift, sharing a series of throwback pictures from the movie.

Nimrat, who played the role of Amrita Katyal in the film, posted the images on her Instagram handle.

The post featured film posters along with several behind-the-scenes moments from the sets, with the actor describing the film's release as pure "celluloid magic".

Sharing her thoughts in the caption, she wrote, "10 years ago today, this celluloid magic happened. The music, the moments, the love just keeps growing — as does my gratitude."

Released on January 22, 2016, Airlift also starred Feryna Wazheer, Kumud Mishra and Purab Kohli in pivotal roles. Featuring Akshay Kumar in the lead, the film was directed by Raja Krishna Menon and was based on India's largest civilian evacuation, which resulted in the rescue of 170,000 Indians from Kuwait during the 1990 Iraqi invasion by businessman Mathunny Mathews.

Meanwhile, Nimrat Kaur was recently spotted out and about in the city, where her effortless and fresh appear-

ance quickly drew attention. The actress was seen arriving at and later stepping out of a popular restaurant, with paparazzi capturing her moments. What caught the eye was not just her attire, but also her warm and gracious interaction with fans who had gathered around her.

For the outing, Nimrat opted for a green floor-length dress that was simple yet elegant. The soothing hue complemented her well and lent a relaxed, daytime vibe to her look. Keeping her styling minimal, she accessorised with a delicate diamond necklace featuring a dangling detail that added a subtle sparkle.

She completed the ensemble with cream-coloured moccasins, striking a balance between comfort and style, making it ideal for a casual city appearance.

On the work front, Nimrat was last seen in The Family Man season 3, which began streaming on Amazon Prime Video on November 21. Created by Raj & DK, the season comprised seven episodes and starred Manoj Bajpayee and Priyamani in lead roles, along with Jaideep Ahlawat, Ashlesha Thakur and Vedant Sinha. (PTI)

Amazon Prime Video renews 'Legally Blonde' prequel 'Elle' for second season

Streaming platform Amazon Prime Video has renewed its "Legally Blonde" prequel series "Elle" for a second season ahead of the premiere of the first season on July 1.

The project is a spin-off series of the 2001 film with the same title, which featured Reese Witherspoon in the role of Elle Woods, who follows her boyfriend to a law school to win him back. In the process, however, she discovers a natural aptitude for the law. A sequel, titled "Legally Blonde 2: Red, White & Blonde", was released in 2003.

"Elle" follows Elle Woods in high school and the life experiences that shaped her into the woman she became in the first Legally Blonde film. Lexi Minetree features in the titular role in the series. Witherspoon, who is the executive producer on the series, said witnessing Minetree step into the shoes of her character was "the most gratifying experience" of her career.

"Twenty-five years after the world met Elle Woods for the first time, it's a dream come true to share the story of how she became the unstoppable force we all fell in love with... Discovering Lexi Minetree and watching her step into Elle's fabulous shoes has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my career. I think our series' themes of kindness, authenticity, and believing in yourself will resonate deeply with fans of the original films and new audiences alike," Witherspoon said in a statement.

"Working with our incredible Hello Sunshine team, Amazon, and our visionary writers and directors to bring Elle's high school journey to life has been a tremendous joy. I can't wait to share season one with the world and start rolling cameras on season two," she added.

The series is created by Laura Kittrell, who also serves as a co-showrunner and executive producer alongside Caroline Dries and Witherspoon. Jason Moore has directed the first two episodes. (PTI)

ZAKIR KHAN ANNOUNCES EXTENDED BREAK FROM COMEDY TO FOCUS ON HEALTH

Stand-up comedian Zakir Khan has announced that he will take an extended break from comedy, saying he wants to prioritise his health after years of continuous touring.

Khan made the announcement during a recent live show in Hyderabad, part of his ongoing 'Papa Yaar' comedy tour.

A video clip from the show, in which the comedian spoke about his decision, surfaced online on Tuesday and quickly went viral on social media.

Addressing the crowd, Khan said the hiatus could stretch over several years, possibly until

2028, 2029 or even 2030.

"I'm going on a long long break, till 2028, 2029 or 2030 probably. I have to take care of my health and to sort out a few other things," Khan said.

The comedian, who appeared visibly emotional, thanked his audience for their continued support.

"Everyone present here tonight is very close to my heart. Your presence means more to me than you can imagine, and I will always be grateful to all of you. Thank you so much," he said. Khan is regarded as one of the popular names on the Indian

comedy circuit due to his witty stand-up performances where he often uses his real-life tragic and humorous stories as a tool to evoke laughter.

He shot to fame in 2012 after he won the title of Comedy Central's "India's Best Stand Up" and has since released five hour-length standup specials: "Haq Se Single" (2017), "Kaksha Gyarvi" (2018), "Tathastu" (2022), "Mannpasand" (2023), and "Delulu Express" (2025) on Prime Video.

Khan also headlined the Prime Video series "Chacha Vidhayak Hain Humare". (PTI)

'A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms' is lighter and happier than other works: George R R Martin

Celebrated author George R R Martin says his new series "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" is one of the lighter and happier stories set in the world of "Game of Thrones", driven by two characters he considers among the best he has ever created.

The show, which started streaming on JioHotstar from January 19, is adapted from Martin's popular "Tales of Dunk and Egg" novellas. He serves as the show's creator alongside Ira Parker.

"A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" follows the adventures of hedge knight Ser Duncan the Tall (Peter Claffey) and his young squire Aegon V Targaryen (Dexter Sol Ansell), nearly 90 years before the events of "Game of Thrones", when the Targaryens still rule Westeros but the age of dragons is fading.

"It's just a story that really seemed to be working for me. And it came alive, and I had these two characters. I knew I had to write more about them because they're two of the best characters I've

ever created, and they're unlike other characters that I have ever created," Martin said in a video provided by American premium cable network HBO.

The 77-year-old author said that writing the character of Egg was particularly meaningful to him.

"I don't write a lot about children because I don't have any. I was one once and I try to go back and see how I was feeling there. So to create a character like Egg and have the feeling that I did it right, and then a character like Dunk — who's very different from me too — I really like the characters and the general tone of the story," he said.

While the series contains familiar elements of his fantasy world — swordplay, betrayals and deaths — Martin said its overall mood sets it apart from "Game of Thrones" as well as "House of the Dragon".

"(It) is lighter and happier than the other books... I think it's come out wonderfully and that people will really like



it," he added.

The show, which has already been renewed for a second season, has received mostly positive reviews, with praise for its tone, characters and fresh take on the Westeros world.

As a writer, Martin said he doesn't believe in repeating the same story over and over again.

"I do know that among my readers, the 'Dunk and Egg' novellas are very popular. A lot of my fans say 'these are

the best things George has ever done.' But I think there's enough people who would like the world to be big and varied with a lot of different stories in it," he said.

Claffey echoed Martin and called "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" a unique and refreshing tale within the franchise.

"It's not a chase for the throne by a bunch of different families. And for a lot of people, that's going to be really refreshing. And for a lot of people, that's probably going to be, maybe, frustrating. I was such a fan of the original series and I know that ours is going to be a lot different."

The Irish actor and a former rugby player warned that the show might not please every fan.

"And there are millions and billions of 'Game of Thrones' fans out there, me being one of them and to think that you're going to please everyone is a very tall order. But I'm savagely proud of what we've done," he added.

Parker, who earlier worked as a writer on shows such as "Rogue" (2015), "Four in the Morning" (2016), and "The Last Ship", said his journey to the show mirrored that of its central knight.

"Pure luck, that's how I got invited to this. I got a text from HBO at four o'clock in the morning, asking me what I thought about Dunk and Egg. I got flown to Santa Fe to meet with (Martin) and spend a week or a few days talking about this show."

"And in a very similar journey to Dunk's season one, I just got a little sort of fortunate push along at the exact right moment, which ultimately led to us doing a version of this that so far we're happy with," he said.

"A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms" also features Daniel Ings, Bertie Carvel, Danny Webb, Sam Spruell, Shaun Thomas, Finn Bennett, Edward Ashley, Tanzy Crawford, Henry Ashton, Youssef Kerkour, Tom Vaughan-Lawlor and Daniel Monks. (PTI)

Djokovic one away from 400 Grand Slam match wins; Wawrinka makes history

MELBOURNE, Jan 22: Novak Djokovic and Stan Wawrinka made it a day for the ages at the Australian Open.

Djokovic improved to 399 wins in Grand Slam matches with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 victory over Francesco Maestrelli on Thursday, making the 38-year-old, 24-time major winner just one shy of becoming the first player ever to 400.

He's aiming to win an unprecedented 25th Grand Slam title. And if he does, he'll beat Ken Rosewall's record (aged 37 in 1972) as the oldest man in the Open era to win a major singles championship.

The Rosewall name was prominent on Day 5 at Melbourne Park, where he was among the invited VIPs.

Wawrinka, at 40 years, 310 days, became the first man over 40 to reach the third round of a major since Rosewall in 1978. It took a 4 1/2-hour 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (3) comeback victory over 21-year-old

qualifier Arthur Gea. That's the longest match of the 2026 tournament so far.

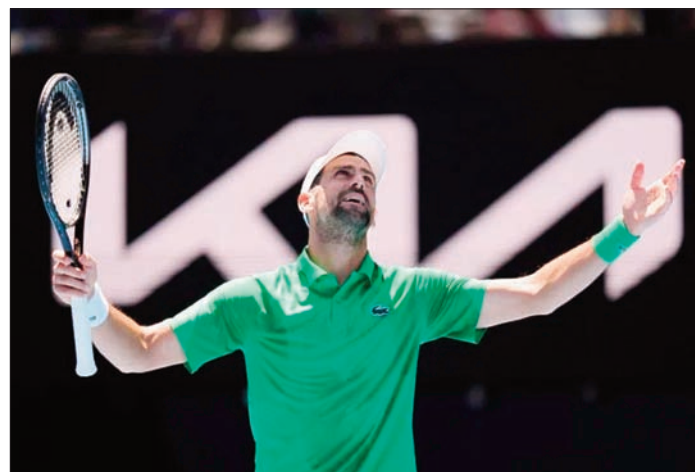
Wawrinka, who is retiring at the end of the year, will next face No. 9 Taylor Fritz.

Before then, he told the crowd at John Cain Arena: "I think I'll pick up a beer. I deserve one!"

His was one of three high-profile matches that finished around the same time, with Jannik Sinner continuing his bid for an Australian Open three-peat after beating James Duckworth 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena. The defining feature of Naomi Osaka's first two rounds quickly moved from fashion to friction when her 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 win over Sorana Cirstea ended in tension.

"I think this was her last Australian Open so, OK, sorry she was mad about it," Osaka said.

Day and night With Sinner facing an Australian wild card, he got the prime time night slot and bumped 10-time Australian Open winner



Djokovic into the afternoon session.

That didn't bother Djokovic as much as the dropped service game in the third set — his first of the tournament. It stung Djokovic, who broke the Italian qualifier at love in the next game and finished on an eight-point roll.

He said he took extra time out in the offseason and fine-tuned some skills as he chases his biggest goals.

"When I have more time, then I obviously try to look at my game and different elements that I can really improve. Otherwise, what's the point?" he said. "That's the kind of

mentality I try to nurture. It's been allowing to me play at the highest level at this age."

Iga Swiatek beat Marie Bouzkova 6-2, 6-3 and later said she's been trying to take lessons from Djokovic's attitude to sustained success and longevity.

"It's good to look at people like that and find inspiration," the six-time major winner said. "For sure I've got to learn to appreciate every single match," she said.

Keys to success
Defending champion Madison Keys was down a double break in the second set before rallying to beat Ashlyn Krueger 6-1, 7-5 and advancing to a third-round match against former No. 1 Karolina Pliskova.

Melbourne is where Keys made her Grand Slam breakthrough 12 months ago and since her return people have been asking her how confident she is about retaining the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup.

"Whether or not I do repeat it," she said, "I still get to keep Daphne at home!"

In that tough quarter of the draw, No. 4 Amanda Anisimova fended off doubles champion Katerina Siniakova 6-1, 6-4 and sixth-seeded Jessica Pegula won 6-0, 6-2 over McCartney Kessler, her doubles partner.

Anisimova, who has been runner-up at the last two major tournaments, will next play fellow American Peyton Stearns. Pegula will next face Oksana Selekhmeteva, who upset 2025 semifinalist Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-4.

No. 5 Elena Rybakina advanced over Varvara Gracheva and No. 10 Belinda Bencic was ousted by Nikola Pietrangeli.

Men's draw
Eighth-seeded Ben Shelton, a semifinalist here last year, reached the third round with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 win over Australian qualifier Dane Sweeny.

His fellow American Eliot Spizziri beat Wu Yibing in five grueling sets and will next face Sinner. Two men's seeds tumbled: Marin Cilic, the 2014 U.S. Open winner, ousted No. 21 Denis Shapovalov and Tomas Machac upset 2023 Australian Open runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5).

Big, big crowds
The combined day and night crowd set a tournament record for the fourth time in five days, rising to 103,720. The cumulative total for the main draw so far is 508,430, prompting a lot of chatter about crowding.

Light will win
Before the start of the night session, spectators were asked to join in a moment of silence to remember the 15 people killed in the Bondi Beach terror attack last month. It was designated a national day of mourning in Australia and signs in Melbourne Park highlighted the message: "Light Will Win." (AP)

Sudip marks comeback with unbeaten ton, Bengal 340/4 vs Services

KALYANI (WB), Jan 22: Veteran left-hander Sudip Chatterjee smashed an unbeaten century to power Bengal to 340/4 at stumps against Services on the opening day of their Group C Ranji Trophy match at the Bengal Cricket Academy ground here on Thursday.

Making a comeback from an injury, the southpaw hit 12 fours and one six in his undefeated knock off 226 balls, while skipper Abhimanyu Easwaran scored a fine 81 (152b).

The duo added 151 runs for the opening wicket to put Services in the back-foot after the visitors opted to bowl.

For Sudip it was his 14th first-class hundred. The opening pair were looking without any trouble before an Abhimanyu's innings was cut short by a run out against the run of play.

Making his 100th first class appearance, Anustup Majumdar fell for 27 off 33 balls. Shahbaz Ahmed also departed after a well-made 38.

At stumps on the opening day, Sudip remained unbeaten along with Sumanta Gupta (31 batting) to give the hosts the advantage.

"Happy to comeback after injury and score a hundred. It will be im-



portant to start well tomorrow and score as many runs as possible," Sudip said.

"Posting a good first innings total will be crucial to put pressure on the opposition. Today's century is special specially after returning from injury."

Uttarakhand bowl out Tripura for 266

Veteran left-arm spinner Mayank Mishra and youngster Janmejy Joshi shared seven wickets to bowl hosts Tripura out for 266 as Uttarakhand made a steady start at stumps

at Maharaja Bir Bikram College Stadium in Agartala.

In reply, Uttarakhand reached 7 for no loss in three overs at stumps, still trailing by 259 runs.

The 35-year-old Mishra returned impressive figures of 4/59, while 24-year-old new-ball bowler Joshi, playing his maiden season, chipped in with 3/48 to contribute to Uttarakhand's disciplined effort.

The game turned soon after the drinks break when Mishra provided the breakthrough, triggering a collapse. Wickets fell at regular inter-

vals thereafter as the Mishra-Joshi duo tightened the screws and shared seven scalps between them.

Sridam Paul held the innings together with a patient 123-ball 75 knock, striking seven fours and a six, but lacked support from the middle order.

Lower down the order, Swapnil Singh struck a counter-attacking unbeaten 60 off 74 balls, hitting nine fours and two sixes, to push Tripura past the 250-mark.

Brief Scores
In Kalyani: Bengal 340/4; 86 overs (Sudip Chatterjee 140 batting, Abhimanyu Easwaran 81) vs Services.

In Agartala: Tripura 266; 82.5 overs (Sridam Paul 75, Swapnil Singh 60 not out; Mayank Mishra 4/59, Janmejy Joshi 3/48). Uttarakhand 7 for no loss; 3 overs.

In Guwahati: Assam 187/6; 86 overs (Sibsankar Roy 38; Aman Kumar 2/31, Anshul Kamboj 2/37, Tanmay Baloda 2/45) vs Haryana.

In Nadiad: Gujarat 175; 55.4 overs (Jaymeet Patel 57; Bhargav Merai 3/26, Zubair Ali 3/36). Railways 78/2; 26 overs (Vivek Singh 34 batting, Ravi Singh 31 batting). (PTI)

Sindhu, Lakshya enter quarterfinals of Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA, Jan 22: Top Indian shuttlers P V Sindhu and Lakshya Sen entered the quarterfinals of USD 500,000 Indonesia Masters badminton tournament after securing straight-game wins in their respective round-of-16 matches here on Thursday. Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze medallist, prevailed over Hong Kong China's Jason Gunawan 21-10 21-11 in a contest that lasted a little over half an hour.

The 24-year-old from Almora, who won the Australian Open last year, will meet Thailand's rising talent Panitchaphon Teeraratrakul, who knocked out Paris bronze medallist Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic-medallist, notched up a 21-19 21-18 triumph over familiar foe Line Hojmark Kjaerfeldt of Denmark in her pre-quarterfinal that took 43 minutes to wind up.

This was Sindhu's fifth win over the Dane in their six clashes so far.

Sindhu will next be up against tournament top seed and world number four Chen Yu Fei of China in the Super 500 event.

Sindhu and Fei have faced each other 13 times so far and the latter holds a slight 7-6 edge overall. The Indian's last win over Fei came back in 2019 and she would be eager to improve that record.

Later in the day, former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medallist, was too erratic to pose any challenge, going down 11-21 10-21 to Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen in a lop-sided pre-quarterfinals.

In women's singles, Anmol Kharb showed a lot of heart to challenge former world champion Nozomi Okuhara before going down 21-16 14-21 11-21 in 56 minutes.

Men's doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and M R Arjun, who secured several titles, including the Al Ain Masters and Turkiye International Challenge in 2025, produced a gallant fight before losing 17-21 21-9 16-21 to third seeded and world number 6 Malaysians Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee in 54 minutes. (PTI)

Roshni finds new goal: From a domestic help to footballer for CISF

DEOLI, Jan 22: Tears rolled down the cheeks of Roshni Verma when she spotted her elder brother Ashok watching the 19-year-old's passing out parade from the stands here at the CISF's regional training centre.

The emotions inside her were stirred not merely by the sight of a loving sibling, but also by the realisation that the days of struggles are finally over for her and the family.

Roshni, two-time national level footballer for Jharkhand, was working as a domestic help in her state when some local acquaintances told her about a vacancy in the CISF for sportspersons.

She saw a chance to shift her life's goalpost to rozier realms, and the third year BA student applied for the job last year.

"I have represented Jharkhand twice in national football tournaments. Growing up in Patragonda village of Kanke in Ranchi, my family had no means to fund my sporting dreams or even educa-

tion," Roshni told PTI.

"There is no one in my family of six people (including parents) who has a job in the organised sector," she added. Roshni then detailed the hardships she had to face to help her parents run the house.

"My parents have no source of income. My three brothers are studying and they help run the house through some irregular little money they get by doing daily-wage jobs."

"Some local 'didis' (elder sister) told me about this CISF vacancy last year and I applied with the hope that this will change my life."

Indeed, it is done now! Roshni was delighted to see Ashok at the ceremony as her elder brother reached the Deoli CISF centre after a long train journey from Ranchi via Delhi and Kota.

"Our parents could not come. They are not well...also we could not get confirmed tickets. So, only I could make it for the passing out event of Roshni," said Ashok as he proudly looked at the head constable rank symbol on Roshni's uniform. Now, they are off to Ranchi to be on the side of their ailing mother.

Roshni might have been only one among the 324 sports quota personnel who gave salute to Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya here.

It was also the largest-ever batch of sportspersons to be recruited at one go in the 56 years history of the central paramilitary force.

However, Roshni's story echoes with the tales of a number of such trainees who were recruited by the force with an aim to secure more medals for the country in national and international tournaments.

CISF director general (DG) Praveer Ranjan said the force will "ensure these sportspersons get to play and perform."

Ranjan said the CISF has recruited the sportspersons in the head constable rank, a notch higher than the normal entry-rank of constable, to encourage more talented youngsters to apply. (PTI)



LUCKNOW, Jan 22: Young opener Sharandeep Singh struck only his second first-class hundred as Jharkhand reached a strong 279 for one against Uttar Pradesh on the first day of their Group A Ranji Trophy fixture here Thursday.

Sharandeep was batting on 128 off 269 balls when the stumps were drawn at the end of opening day's play at the Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium.

Giving Sharandeep company was Aryaman Sen on 64 off 126 balls, as Jharkhand ended the day with the nose ahead after 86 overs had been bowled.

Sharandeep's opening partner, Shikhar Mohan batted well for a neat 78 off 123 balls after the visitors were asked to bat first by UP skipper Aryan Juyal. Jharkhand, who are placed third in the points table to UP's fourth, began on a fine note with the duo of Sharandeep and Shikhar looking in good nick.

The right-left combination of Sharandeep and Shikhar rotated the strike and also found the boundaries without much difficulty to put pressure on the UP

bowlers.

Sharandeep and Shikhar added 147 runs for the first wicket before the former stitched together another partnership of 132 runs for the second wicket to consolidate Jharkhand's fine start.

Vidarbha lead the group with 25 points, whereas Andhra with 22 points are at the second spot. Jharkhand have 18 points, and UP are at the fourth position with 17 points.

Only an outright win can keep UP's hopes alive for a knockout berth.

The hosts are missing the services of Rinku Singh, who is on national duty in the ongoing T20I series against New Zealand. The southpaw has scored 341 runs this season and his two centuries in the back-to-back matches helped Uttar Pradesh gain a vital first innings lead in those matches.

Besides Rinku, the other notable name missing from the match is Dhruv Jurel.

Brief scores:
Jharkhand 1st innings 279/1 in 86 overs (Sharandeep Singh batting 128, Shikhar Mohan 78, Aryaman Sen batting 64) vs Uttar Pradesh.

At Vadodara:
Nagaland 1st innings 206 all out in 57 overs (Chetan Bist 37, Ronit More not out 37, Dega Nischal 33; Atit Sheth 3/31 vs Baroda 139/1 in 31 overs.

At Bhubaneswar:
Tamil Nadi 1st innings: 291/7 in 83 overs (Pradosh Ranjan Paul 78C Andre Siddarth 56, Nidhish Rajagopal batting 54, Athish SR 50) vs Odisha.

At Anantapur:
Vidarbha 1st innings 267/7 in 81 overs (Yash Rathod 104; K S Narasimha Raju 4/51). (PTI)

Ridhima Dilawari opens four-shot lead in the second leg of Hero WPG Tour

AHMEDABAD, Jan 22: Ridhima Dilawari closed the second day with a bogey but before that she produced four birdies in a row, helping her to a round of 3-under 69 to go with her first round score of 70 here. Ridhima, who last won at Zion Hills Country Club in Bengaluru in July 2025, is now 5-under for two rounds and extended her lead over the field from one shot to four shots at the Hero WPG Tour.

Lying second is amateur Zara Anand (72-71) at 1-under 143. Jahanvi Bakshi (73-71), whose eagle on the Par-5 fifth made up for the bogeys on the second and the fourth, picked up one shot on the Par-3 11th and carded 1-under 71 to be Tied-third alongside Amandeep Drall (72-72).

For the present, Ridhima, who has been dividing her time between the Hero WPG Tour and the IGPL, seems to have built a big lead of four shots, but behind her, there are as many as eight players within three shots of each other.

Amandeep seemed to be headed for a good day as she had four birdies against two bogeys through 17 holes. She ran into trouble on the last hole and the double bogey dropped her to even par for the second straight day.

Amateur Lavanya Gupta had a roller-coaster of a day. She began with a nightmare start with two bogeys and a double bogey in a row on the first three holes. She recovered with birdies on the fourth, fifth and the eighth but another bogey on the ninth meant she turned in 2-over. Four birdies and no bogeys on the back nine gave her a superb 70 after a 75 in the first round. She was in a tie for fifth place with Nayanika Sanga (73-72) at 1-over 145 each.

Vani Kapoor and Saanvi Somu shot a second straight 73 each and were tied seventh alongside Sneha Singh (71-75), who slipped in the second round.

Amateur Janneya A Dasanniece (79-72), Rhea Purvi (76-75) and Lavanya Jadon (75-76) rounded off the Top-10 as they were tied tenth at 7-over 151. (PTI)

Beyond medals lies your greatest achievement: Tendulkar pays tribute to Saina

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar on Thursday paid glowing tribute to former badminton world number one Saina Nehwal, saying her career was a testament to how greatness is built over time and that her legacy extended far beyond medals.

Saina, who has been out of action for the last two years due to a chronic knee condition, confirmed her retirement from competitive badminton earlier this week, saying her body could no longer cope with the physical demands of elite sport.

The 35-year-old from Hyderabad, a 2012 London Olympic bronze medallist, last played a competitive match at the Singapore Open in 2023 but did not formally announce her retirement at the time.

"Dear Saina, your career is proof that greatness is built one day at a time, with patience,



courage, and consistency," Tendulkar said in a post on 'X'. "You carried Indian badminton to the world stage and showed that belief, when matched with preparation, can change the course of a sport. Beyond the medals lies your

greatest achievement." Tendulkar said Saina's biggest achievement went beyond medals, as she inspired young athletes across the country to believe that success at the highest level was possible.

"Inspiring young athletes across the country to believe that global success is possible. Every sporting journey evolves, and while one phase ends, another begins," the batting icon wrote.

"One where your experience, perspective, and love for the game will continue to guide many. Thank you for everything you've given to Indian sport. Your influence will be felt for generations."

Saina's career was significantly impacted by a career-threatening knee injury at the Rio 2016 Olympics. She made a strong comeback to win a World Championships bronze in 2017 and the Commonwealth Games gold in 2018, but recurring knee issues continued to disrupt her progress.

In 2024, she revealed that she has arthritis in her knees and that her cartilage has worn away, making it extremely difficult to train at the intensity required for top-level competition. (PTI)

KIWG: TN, MP take gold; Haryana remain on top



LEH, Jan 22: Tamil Nadu's Avikshith Vijay Viswanat and Udreka Singh from Madhya Pradesh demonstrated their prowess with a gold-medal winning performance in the men's and women's 500m long track event on day 3 of the Khelo India Winter Games here on Thursday.

Haryana continued to lead the medal tally, courtesy the pair of figure skating gold medals won on Wednesday. Uttarakhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh share the second spot with a gold each while hosts Ladakh is at sixth

position with two silver and two bronze.

While 19-year-old Avikshith defended his Khelo India Winter Games gold from last year with a timing of 43.48 seconds, 15-year-old Udreka, in her third KIWG, has shown remarkable improvement over the years.

Wearing long track boots and blades for the first time, Udreka (53.94 seconds) sped to the gold ahead of local favourite Skarma Tsultim (54.21 seconds). Tasnia Shameem (57.41 sec) of Ladakh won the bronze at Gupukh's Pond, a

frozen water body beside the Indus. "We've been friends since I started skating. Defeating Skarma feels good because she's a local and has the advantage of training in high-altitude conditions in Leh. Athletes from the plains always struggle a bit, so this win is special," said Udreka to SAI Media.

"There have been times when Skarma has been faster than me ... it keeps switching between us. I am happy that both of us will be on the podium tomorrow."

Primarily a roller skater who switched to ice skating only a year ago, Avikshith's four-month training in the Netherlands ahead of the event benefited him.

The top six positions in this race were shared between Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Danda Chandra Mouli (43.97) of Andhra won the silver while Karnataka's Harshit BT (44.13) won bronze.

In ice hockey, Army won their second straight match in group A. Having beaten Himachal Pradesh 5-1 in their opening match on Tuesday, Army romped to a 10-1 win against Chandigarh at the NDS Stadium on Thursday. (PTI)

ICC Board votes against BCB request

Bangladesh matches to be played in India as scheduled

DUBAI, Jan 22: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday rejected the request from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to shift its team's T20 World Cup fixtures to Sri Lanka, saying the matches will proceed as scheduled since there was no credible threat to the safety of Bangladesh players, officials or fans at any of the tournament venues in India.

The decision was taken at an ICC Board meeting held via video conference, which was convened to discuss the situation after the BCB raised concerns and sought a change in venues.

"The ICC Board noted that relocating matches under the present circumstances could jeopardise the sanctity of ICC events and undermine the organisation's neutrality as a global governing body," the ICC said in a statement.

According to the ICC, the Board reviewed multiple security assessments, including independent evaluations, all of which concluded that there was no credible threat to Bangladesh players.

ICC sources told PTI that out of 16 members, 14 voted against BCB's relocation request. The ICC has given BCB one more day to reflect and take a final position.

"Of all the members, only BCB and

Pakistan voted in favour of the relocation request while all other voted against it. Bangladesh was given time till January 21 to confirm its participation but they have been given one more day by the ICC Board to state their position," said the ICC source.

The ICC also said that making changes to the schedule at such a late stage was not feasible and that altering fixtures in the absence of a verified security risk could set an "undesirable precedent" for future global events.

The world governing body said its management had held a series of meetings and correspondences with the BCB in recent weeks, sharing detailed information on the tournament's security arrangements.

These included venue-specific plans and assurances of layered protection involving federal and state law enforcement agencies.

BCB president Aminul Islam said he is hoping for a miracle from the ICC.

"I am hoping for a miracle from the ICC. Who doesn't want to play in the World Cup? The Bangladesh players want to play the World Cup. The Bangladesh government wants Bangladesh to play the World Cup," he was quoted as saying in a ESPNcricinfo



report. "But we don't think India is safe for our players. A government doesn't only consider the players, but they consider all, when it takes a decision."

He said he would speak to the Bangladesh government one more time on the matter.

"I asked the ICC board for time to talk to my government for one last time," Aminul said in the report.

"They said it's a valid point, and gave me 24 or 48 hours to get back to them. I

don't want to put pressure on the government. We know that India is not secure for us. We remain in the stance that we want to play in Sri Lanka. I know the ICC denied us but we will talk to the government one more time. I will inform the ICC about the government's feedback."

An ICC spokesperson said the organisation had engaged in "sustained and constructive dialogue" with the BCB with the objective of ensuring Bangladesh's participation in the tournament.

"Independent security assessments,

comprehensive venue-level security plans and formal assurances from host authorities consistently concluded that there is no credible or verifiable threat to the safety or security of the Bangladesh team in India," the spokesperson said.

The ICC, however, expressed concern that the BCB continued to link its participation to what it described as a "single, isolated and unrelated development" involving one of its players' participation in a domestic league, a matter the ICC said had no bearing on the tournament's security framework.

The Board reiterated that venue and scheduling decisions are guided by objective threat assessments, host guarantees and agreed participation terms, which apply uniformly to all 20 teams in the competition.

"In the absence of any independent security findings that materially compromise safety, the ICC is unable to relocate fixtures. Doing so would carry significant logistical and scheduling consequences for other teams and fans worldwide, and would also create far-reaching precedent-related challenges that risk undermining the neutrality, fairness, and integrity of ICC governance," the spokesperson said.

Bangladesh government's sports advisor Asif Nazrul on Tuesday had reiterated

that under no condition would the national team travel to India.

It is highly likely that if Bangladesh decide to pull out of the tournament, Scotland may replace Bangladesh as per current rankings. The crisis was triggered by the removal of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from Kolkata Knight Riders' roster for this year's Indian Premier League on BCCI's instructions for unspecified "developments all around".

Citing security concerns and national pride, the BCB responded by announcing its national team won't travel to India for its T20 World Cup group stage games in Kolkata and Mumbai.

BCB wants to play each of the four group stage matches in Sri Lanka, where the marquee India-Pakistan clash will also be held as per the mutually agreed arrangement for ICC events until 2027.

In their last meeting with ICC officials in Dhaka, the BCB had proposed swapping positions with Ireland in Group B, which features tournament co-hosts Sri Lanka, Australia, Oman and Zimbabwe. Such a move would allow Bangladesh to remain in Sri Lanka for their group engagements. The bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh have deteriorated in recent months, exacerbated by the killings of Hindus in Bangladesh. (PTI)

IOA creating confusion, have already sent long list of golfers for Asian Games: IGU

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Indian Golf Union Director General Maj Gen (Retd) Bibhuti Bhushan on Thursday blamed the Indian Olympic Association for creating confusion and said that, as the sole recognised national body for the sport, it has already sent a long list of players for this year's Asian Games.

Bhushan said IGU had submitted the names of eight men and eight women golfers for the Asian Games before the cut-off date of January 15 and the matter now rests with the IOA.

IGU is recognised by the Union Sports ministry and International Golf Federation (IGF), but another set of office-bearers, led by Harish Kumar Shetty, has been recognised by the IOA after two separate elections were held in December 2024, leading to turmoil in the fraternity.

"I want to make it very clear that there is no other faction, there is only one IGU. IGU is recognised by the international federation, IGU is recognised by the Asian body, IGU is recognised by the Ministry of Sports, even IGU is registered with the Registrar of Societies," Bhushan told PTI on the sidelines of a promo-

tional event here.

"IGU is running all the tournaments pan India, 50 odd tournaments. We are selecting teams and sending for international tournaments. 15 teams we have sent in the last one year. What are they (other faction) doing, what they have done in the last one year, have they even conducted one tournament?"

"You must ask this to IOA they are doing confusion. They are the confusion creators. We are recognised by everybody in the world," he added.

Bhushan came down hard on IOA and said the IGU has the backing of the government and the courts.

"We are giving funds to the players which come to us from the ministry to us. The ministry is very clear and, in fact, the Hon'ble Delhi High Court has also directed the IOA not to engage with that body. I don't know why they are doing it," he said.

Bhushan said the Asian Games list has been prepared keeping in mind the world rankings and pointed out that only three golfers -- each in both men and women categories -- will be selected for the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian

Games to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4.

"We have sent the names based on the world rankings which is the norm. They (IOA) will not say they have accepted it but players are not going to suffer. There is a set selection procedure based on world golf rankings, we are not conducting any trials." There is a confusion being created," he said.

"Eventually 3 boys and 3 girls will be selected for the Asian Games. But as of now we have sent the long list of eight boys and eight girls. Prior to the final date whoever comes in the top 3 will be selected for Asian Games."

The IGU DG reiterated that the federation is the only recognised body for the sport in the country and said that two golfers each in the men's and women's categories will be sent for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"In Olympics, the selection system is different. We have the Olympic World Golf Rankings which is finalised 2-3 months before the Olympics. So we are hoping to send 2 boys and 2 girls in next Olympics," he concluded. (PTI)

WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS), Jan 22: World champion D Gukesh ended his spate of draws by defeating Thai Dai Van Nguyen of Czech Republic but overnight joint leader Arjun Erigaisi was shocked by Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia in the fifth round of Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here.

Gukesh's timely victory ahead of the first rest day on Thursday put him on three points out of a possible five and the Indian ace went up to joint fourth spot behind three leaders.

While the game between Hans Niemann of the USA and Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan ended in the draw, the two were joined by latter's compatriot and World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov who defeated young Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus after some great resistance.

With three leaders on 3.5, Gukesh shares the fourth spot with Fedoseev and Dutchman Jordan van Foreest.

With nine rounds still to come in the 114-player and 13-round tournament, Erigaisi slipped to joint seventh spot on 2.5 points, a point ahead of two other Indians -- Aravindh Chithambaram and R Praggnanandhaa.

Gukesh won with black pieces out of a Queen's Indian defense game. It was a highly technical battle with the Indian sacrificing a rook for a minor piece to exert pressure against the black king and Nguyen simply could not withstand the pressure. The game lasted 51 moves.

"It was a nice grind," said the world champion, who also said that his slow four-draw start could have been much faster if not for a near



miss against Sindarov in the first round. "I was supposed to win the first one but I missed by a whisker. I'm pretty much happy with most of the games that I played so far. Although I didn't get the win I knew I was playing good, so it was expected that I would get it at some point."

"The one thing that helped (against Sindarov) was it was just so long I was too tired to be upset!" Arjun faced a hugely risky variation as white by Fedoseev who has bounced back really well following an uncharacteristic loss in the opener against Niemann.

The strategy paid off as Arjun drifted in to a passive position in the middle game and his pieces got stuck in the centre. Making matters worse was his weak king and the Indian did not

recover. R Praggnanandhaa played his third draw in the event against Anish Giri of Holland and Aravindh Chithambaram went down to German Vincent Keymer to remain on 1.5 points from his five games.

Results round 5 (Indians unless specified): R Praggnanandhaa (1.5) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 1.5); Arjun Erigaisi (2.5) lost to Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 3); Thai Dai Van Nguyen (Cze 1.5) lost to D Gukesh (3); Jordan van Foreest (Ned, 3) drew with Matthias Bluebaum (Ger, 2.5); Hans Moke Niemann (Usa, 3.5) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 3.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2.5) beat Aravindh Chithambaram (1.5); Javokhir Sindarov (Uzb, 3.5) beat Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus (Tur, 2). (PTI)

Birina brings home gold from Int'l Yoga C'ship

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Jan 22: Birina Gowala, a Class V student of PM SHREE Town Primary School No 1, has won a gold medal in the traditional category at the International Yoga Championship held recently in Macau, China, bringing laurels to Assam and the district.

Birina, the daughter of teachers Anil Gowla and Sunita Panging Gowla, also secured second prize in the artistic rhythmic pair category and finished as second runner-up in the Champion of the Champions category at the international event. Earlier, Birina had won the national-level yoga championship held in Gujarat last year, which led to her selection for the international competition in Macau. On her return home to Taxi Ali on Wednesday, Birina was felicitated by various organisations, including the Gowala Samaj and the Assam Tea Tribal Students' Association, in recognition of her achievements at the global level.

CISF recruits highest-ever sportspersons; Mandaviya asks them to 'keep playing'

DEOLI (RAJASTHAN), Jan 22: The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on Thursday commissioned the largest ever contingent of 324 sports personnel in one go with an aim to secure more medals in various national and international events, including the Olympic Games.

The trainees, including 171 women, passed out of the Regional Training Centre of the force located in Deoli town of Tonk district. The town is about 165 km south of state capital Jaipur.

Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya flew down from Delhi to officiate as the chief guest of the event.

He took salute of the regimental marching band and asked the new CISF

entrants to "keep playing" and strive towards making India a top-10 sports-playing nation by 2036.

India is bidding to host the 2036 Olympic Games in Ahmedabad, the city that will also conduct the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

The 324 personnel were recruited in 2025 after the central paramilitary force conducted its largest-ever sports quota recruitment drive since its raising in 1969.

Eighteen among these personnel have won gold medals in international sporting events while 56 have earned the same laurel in national events, the force has stated. The sportspersons who passed out on Thursday are joining the force in the

rank of Head Constable, one rank above the normal entry-rank of constable. This was done to attract more personnel.

CISF director general (DG) Praveer Ranjan said the force is taking all measures to "encourage" sports and sportspersons. The trainees underwent a four-month training in law, unarmed combat, weapon handling since they joined the centre here in September, a senior officer said.

The CISF, which has a strength of about two lakh personnel, is primarily tasked to guard over 70 civil airports, the Delhi Metro and a number of other vital installations in the government and private domain. (PTI)

'Napoli should be angry' as they head to Juventus after Champions League misery

MILAN, Jan 22: Napoli players are making life difficult for themselves and face an uphill struggle in Europe and at home.

Coach Antonio Conte was fuming after Napoli could only draw against 10-man Copenhagen on Tuesday to leave it on the brink of Champions League elimination, saying he and his players should be "angry and disappointed" in themselves.

"We all have to hold our hands up, there's little to talk about, we just need to be angry — very, very angry — with ourselves," Conte said. "Maybe we didn't perceive the importance of what was at stake. It's as if we were running a race downhill and somehow we made it uphill all by ourselves."

Napoli's injury problems continue to mount but Conte said his team should still have beaten Copenhagen, especially with a man advantage for most of the match.

Napoli will likely fall out of the Champions League completely next week unless it manages to beat Chelsea.

Before that it faces a tricky trip to Juventus on Sunday, looking to avoid losing more ground in the Serie A title race.

Napoli has slipped to third, six points behind league leader Inter Milan after last weekend's victory over Sassuolo ended a run of three straight draws. The defending champion is only four points above fifth-placed Juventus.

Key matchups
The match in Turin sees both coaches face their former teams.

Spalletti left Napoli in 2023 after steering it to its first league title in 33 years, saying at the time that he needed a year off. However, just three months later he was

appointed as the new Italy coach after Roberto Mancini surprisingly resigned.

Spalletti was fired from the Italy job in June and Juventus hired him in October after the Bianconeri fired Igor Tudor for a poor start to the season. Conte played for Juventus for 13 years and steered the team to three straight titles as coach from 2011-14.

Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 at home seven weeks ago.

By the time the teams kick off in Turin, Inter could be nine points clear of Napoli as the Nerazzurri host relegation-threatened Pisa on Friday.

Second-placed AC Milan visits Roma on Sunday in another intriguing tussle. Milan is three points below Inter and four above fourth-placed Roma.

Players to watch
Donyell Malen had a dream debut for Roma last week, scoring just two days after joining on loan from Aston Villa.

New AC Milan signing Niclas Füllkrug will also be pushing for a place in the starting lineup after scoring the only goal in his team's victory over Lecce, three minutes after being substituted in.

Out of action
Winger Matteo Politano and defender Amir Rahmani are the latest Napoli players out injured. They have joined David Neres, Kevin De Bruyne, Frank Anguissa, Billy Gilmour and Alex Meret in the treatment room. Milan winger Alexis Saelemaekers has an adductor injury and is a big doubt for the Roma match.

Off the field
Roma and Fiorentina supporters have been banned from away fixtures in Italy for the rest of the season. (AP)

Leander Paes turns to golf, eyes nurturing Olympic champions

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: The winner of 18 Grand Slam titles, tennis great Leander Paes has shifted focus to golf as he now aims to nurture Olympic champions across multiple sporting disciplines.

Paes has partnered with Indian Golf Union (IGU), Professional Golfers' Association of India (PGA) and The Gold Foundation (TGF) to build a pipeline of emerging golf talent in the country.

The Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL), in association with IGU, PGA, and TGF on Thursday unveiled the 'Golf Growth Initiative,' a landmark program designed to build the next generation of Indian golfers.

Launched at the Delhi Golf Club in the presence of Paes, the initiative marks a major shift in the sport's development, taking golf directly into schools and playgrounds to widen the talent pool.

The program brings together the entire golfing ecosystem, including mentorships from former golfers

such as Jeev Milkha Singh, Jyoti Randhawa, Shiv Kapur, Gaganjeet Bhullar, SSP Chawrasia and Gaurav Ghei.

Paes, an Olympic and the only tennis player to compete in seven Olympic Games, aims to build 10 academies for different sports throughout the country in the next 10 years.

"To me excellence in sports is to create your own legacy. I belong to a family of 2 Olympians and so I know how to create Olympians. I am looking at Olympic movements through all sports, including golf. 18 Grand Slam wins and 18 holes is the reason why golf attracted me," he said. "I have opened a Flying Man Academy in Bhubaneswar to nurture future Olympians. The academy currently has 1 lakh kids, including 40,000 tribal, 40,000 paid and 20,000 international kids. I want to develop Olympic champions."

Talking about his interest in golf, Paes said his vision is to take the



game to the masses and develop a robust grassroots system.

"My focus in golf is to create academies, driving ranges, golf courses and take the game to the masses, Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and villages because our Olympic champions generally emerge from there," he said.

In a major announcement, IGPL

confirmed a strategic partnership with The Golf Foundation (TGF) to drive grassroots scouting. To support this, IGPL announced the immediate establishment of world-class training facilities in Orissa, Gurgaon, and Andhra Pradesh starting this year.

These centres will serve as regional hubs for identifying raw tal-